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GANDHIJI : A STUDY

GANDHIJI

A Study

HIREN MUKERJEE

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PREFACE

This book has been a great deal more difficult to write than I had expected. I had an idea that wanting to write as badly as I did, and having the "hang" of the matter more or less clear in my mind, I had only to settle down to it and the thing would get done. That has not happened, and for very good reason. I usually write very fast, or not at all. And while my mind was full of this book, I have often had to stop writing, for days. One cannot write on Gandhiji with flippant ease and bandy ready-made formulations.

Perhaps in spite of my desire I would not have made up my mind to write if I was not encouraged to do so by a great man whom I shall not name. I fear he will not agree with much of what I say, but if he comes to think, which I hope he will not, that my approach and my conclusions are fundamentally wrong, I shall be grieved.

I am, as many are aware, a worker in the Communist movement. I owe it to my comrades to say that those among them, to whom I have talked about this book, have wanted me freely to write the way I have felt. Bishnu Dey, the poet, and Mohit Sen, a colleague in the Party, have read part of the manuscript with, I venture to think, a measure of approbation. There is nothing so crude, however, as what is called a Party "line" on Gandhiji. though we have, generally speaking. a common understanding of his role. It will be seen that this book is being brought out by the Party's publishing house in Calcutta, but the responsibility for it is, of course, entirely mine.

I have kept the references down to a minimum, but have appended a note on books. I regret I have not seen the article on Gandhi in the Soviet Encyclopaedia, either in the earlier or the revised editions, but I do not think I have missed very much. I have relied on material more intimately related to the Mahatma and the impact made by his personality and his movement on me and my generation for nearly three decades.

It was, particularly, a strain to write the last chapter, "Gandhi and India". I have had to be repetitive and perhaps also a little muddled. I have even had to worry if in some vital

matters thinking-out-things by itself carries us far enough. I am not very happy with the form of the chapter or its content, which is too varied, perhaps, for an easy summing-up. But I claim I have tried, and I can do no more, to be true to myself and therefore to my great subject.

Two very different books—E. M. S. Namboodiripad's 'The Mahatma and the 'Ism'', and the second massive tome of Pyarelal's "Mahatma Gandhi : the Last Phase"—came out as this book was nearly completed. I have, nevertheless, sought to utilise them to the extent that was possible.

This book is dedicated to my father's memory.

Parliament House
New Delhi.

HIREN MUKERJEE

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CHAPTER I

APOLOGIA

I have long thought of writing on Gandhiji, but have also often felt deterred. It is presumption, no doubt, to write on the phenomenon that he was, when I belong to a generation neither near enough to him nor far enough away. I cannot, with pretension to authority, give either intimate impressions of him or an altogether aloof appraisal. To write nevertheless has seemed also to be an obligation, and not merely a sentimental urge. After all, we did see Gandhi plain, when he was hero to more millions of Indian humanity than any of his kind before. We thrilled to his words, strong in their elemental quietude, and were strangely moved even when he did something, patently paradoxical—a fast, for example, professedly unto death, to change other people's hearts and cleanse his own. Some of us, critically examining his role, have veered away from his ways and declined a discipleship to which our earlier emotions drew us, but he alone, among our leaders, has had the incomparable quality of out-topping controversy—if ripeness is all, his life, in spite of recurrent exasperating phases, had fulfilment.

And so it could happen that in 1944-45, the then Secretary of the Communist Party of India could, without crudity and cant, call him the Father of the Nation even as he was engaged with Gandhiji in seriously disputatious correspondence. And so it could happen that in spite of our impatience with him during certain periods of the national movement and certain manifestations of the eccentricity of his genius, not even the most defiant iconoclast among us could deny the unfailing source of strength in his character—his uncanny link with the life and thoughts of the lowliest of our people, his power to evoke massive endeavour, his single-mindedness and his stupendous equanimity.

Of Gandhiji, himself often contrary in his ways, contrary judgments can with nearly equal truth be made. On one hand, it may well be said that none in history perhaps has

had, like him, the sustained loyalty over many years of so many millions of human beings ready to do his bidding for freedom, and yet the results achieved are, in proportion, puny. For no less than thirty years did India render him homage and was ready for heroism at his command, and yet SWARAJ, when it came with Britain's transfer of power to a partitioned India in August, 1947, threw Gandhi in the throes of agony at the debacle of the spirit which was its concomitant—a debacle which he fought gloriously in the six great months of life that were left to him. On the other hand, it may also be said that never in history did one man contribute more to the ceaseless guiding and moulding of the protracted struggle of a multitudinous people whose emergence in freedom was bound, whatever the early stresses, to change the moral climate of the world. Through him, incomparably more than through any other individual, has India to-day been paying the price of her hoary history—through his stumblings and turnings, as he craved for light, has India, weighted down by the load of her past, sought to step forward in an unaccustomed world. As contradictory in himself as India also has been, Gandhi represented her more magistrally than others who had perhaps a clearer and maybe even a longer vision. And in his serenity, which a life-time of experiment with himself had given him, he embodied, as few have done in Indian history, the soul of our land. If, as Max Müller once said, one finds oneself everywhere in India between an immense past and an immense future, the chasm could be bridged in our age by none other than Mahatma Gandhi.

It is sometimes helpful if writing on a subject that is vital and challenging, one gives the reader something of the background of one's judgment, something, in short, of an autobiographic excursus. This is what Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, did when he wrote some years ago on "the socialist sixth of the world," the U.S.S.R. Writing on Gandhi who was one of the elect in her history whom India has clasped to her heart and matched against her mountains and the sea, it is perhaps incumbent to follow the Dean, and of course also to remember that the writer can obtrude himself only to the extent that he must.

I was brought up in a modest middle-class Bengali home,

urban but without luxuries, where every living room had its clutter of books in three languages, Bengali, Sanskrit and English, and masses of newspapers filed for reference purposes and cardboard-bound hunks where cuttings were pasted, and where on Sundays the sitting-room, whence we were banned till we grew up, would resound for hours to loud and perhaps exciting talk on politics and literature and Heaven knows what other subject. We came thus to inhale, with the very air we breathed, a sort of interest in public affairs and in learning—an interest which pervaded the atmosphere, so to speak, but in a loose and flighty fashion. And in early adolescence I came to hold as fast as I could to a hero of my choosing, and that was Gandhi.

It was not without an effort, for Gandhi, though he commanded respect, was not particularly lionised by my people. Journalists, who see a little too much of public figures and their many weak spots, develop a certain cynicism. My grandfather had been prominent in the second generation of Bengali journalists, and my father was for many years Surendranath Banerjee's principal leader-writer. They both somewhat disapproved of Gandhi, thought him negative and rather medieval, powerful no doubt but odd. Even in the office of a nationalist Bengali daily, where I would often accompany my grandfather, there was, I sensed, a mixture of enthusiasm for Gandhi, whose policies the paper wholly supported in 1920-22, and of a kind of inarticulate antipathy. Perhaps this was because Bengal, as with facile emotional abandon she plunged into the Gandhi era, had perhaps her own mental reservations about him—her support to movements successively launched by Gandhi was every time massive, but tinged with an undercurrent of dubiety.

All this, of course, I did not know at the time, but in my own way I was drawn deeply towards the stir that was in the very air of 1920-21. To salve the sting of subjection, as it were, I needed patriotic pride which I began to seek even then in our storied past, and in Gandhi, who seemed to me an apostle of pity and power walking straight out of the worn pages of Indian history, I thought I found what I was looking for.

I was too young to participate in his movement, and our staying away from school for a few weeks, was not so much a

deliberate act as a spontaneous happening. But I breathed in the exhilaration of the great days of 1920-22 which still, in retrospect, seem unique. And I can recall, as if it were yesterday, the great meetings and processions, Hindus and Muslims lustily shouting slogans together, the unforgetable *hartal* in Calcutta on November 17, 1921, when the Prince of Wales landed in Bombay, the spirit indeed of a people roused from slumber and determined to be free. I remember vividly an incident, which did not then seem quite so quaint, when a doctor asked my grandfather what he should do with his British currency notes, since December 31, 1921, by which day the Mahatma had promised Swaraj, was approaching ! I remember much else, but it need not be recounted.

Even after Chauri-Chaura (February, 1922), when Gandhiji, admitting another of his "Himalayan" blunders, withdrew the movement, and the country, avid for action, gasped and reeled at the leader's gesture, the old, familiar magic did not appreciably weaken. I can recall the atmosphere in the newspaper office where I was already an *habitué*, and the tense interest with which was read in the editor's room the article for the next day on Gandhi's arrest. And I can recall also the memorable averment of an eminent Bengali writer, Pramatha Chaudhuri, to whom Gandhi's historic statement in court during his trial (March 18, 1922) came as a cleanser of all doubts and misgivings about the grandeur of the man and his movement.

As the people's resurgence waned, we retreated, no doubt, from the near-Pisgah heights that had been scaled, but we clung to Gandhi, above all, as the symbol of our spirit. For some three years, till he died suddenly in June 1925, Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das was, with Motilal Nehru, India's greatest leader, but there was no question about the sheer uniqueness of Gandhi's enshrinement in our hearts. I remember how, instead of taking down lecture-notes in college, I would fill pages with Gandhi quotations that had stuck—some still are stuck—in my memory, or with sayings of noted people about Gandhi, like the American clergyman John Haynes Holmes' courageous comparison (in 1921) of Gandhi with Jesus Christ : "He lives His life, He speaks His word, and will some day nobly die for His kingdom on earth."

There was in me perhaps a certain slackness of spirit,

or a potential propensity to dissent, for I could not quite become a whole-hogging Gandhi adherent. I never span, though I defended *Khadi* not only as freedom's livery but as an essential economic palliative, and for some six or seven years, till I left for England, I wore the stuff, in spite of a certain ridicule from the family—I remember once even stealthily fanning my *dhoti* strung indoors during heavy rains, so that the miserable thing would dry and be ready for wear next day! For four years or more, I was a vegetarian, and then gave up as I felt it was too easy and not particularly sensible.

Slowly but surely I developed a critical view of Gandhiji's policies, for I was drawn, on one hand, towards specifically political forms of agitation which C. R. Das and his colleagues espoused, and on the other, towards the fearless idealism of so-called "terrorists" who, with the recession of non-co-operation, had emerged again in Bengal and were soon to spread out to the northern provinces. Till I was nearly twenty, I had little notion of the role of workers and peasants, though rumblings of their power had begun to be heard even on Calcutta's streets—in college, political science was taught us so that our youthful predilection for socialism could be fobbed off with the assurance that socialism, while it was a bit of all right, was not realisable this side of the golden gates of paradise. I remember I collected in 1928 Jawaharlal Nehru's "Soviet Russia", and had dipped into Rene Fulop-Müller's "Mind and Face of Bolshevism" and "Lenin and Gandhi". But I knew little of the Soviet achievement and less of the massive intellectual framework of Marxism.

It was during my four-and-a-half-year stay in Europe that I tried to fill in this gaping lacuna in my mind. I daresay there was something very Indian in my yearning for a pattern of thinking that could take all knowledge for its province and also all forms of experience, but it was the impact of the West, with its human dynamism, which settled it for me and drew me towards Marxism. I began to view Gandhiji differently, and I believe, more correctly—I saw factors in our epoch which he had slurred over, I saw hiatuses in his understanding. Lest I be misunderstood, I should say that I felt reinforced in my Indian-ness—our roots, I realised, touched different soil from the West's—but I could truthfully exclaim:

"What do they know of India who only India know?" We were in England when the great 1930 movement began, and we were moved just as strongly as if we were at home—this found crude expression once when, in June 1930, Rabindranath Tagore came to Oxford and the president of our *majlis* nearly upbraided him for not being in India with our people. This youthful presumption stung the poet who, in answer, recited unforgettably a poem that, for Bengalis in the audience, illumined new vistas of emotion.

When Gandhiji, in late 1931, attended in London the Round Table Conference, our reactions were mixed—apart from the rights and wrongs of his being at the conference, his juxtaposition, perhaps inevitable, of the role of India's organ-voice for freedom and of a world-teacher with an unusual message, led to much of his stay being perhaps a little futile. But it was symptomatic of the stature of the man that when he came to Oxford for a meeting, clad in his loin-cloth and with a rough *shawl* around his shoulders, the entire assemblage rose as if in homage to a king—a completely spontaneous and for a western audience, unaccustomed gesture at a public meeting.

Many of us had begun to differ drastically from him, but we gloried in him nevertheless, and even more, felt, like nearly all Indians, a strange kinship. This was clear when he fasted in the autumn of 1932, for a change in the British Government's Communal Award, and in far-away England we felt anguished and anxious and yet, in a peculiar sense, elevated. Blessed must be the power that can evoke such sentiments, that can make men who are disparate feel so much like members of one another.

Returning home in mid-1934, I soon discovered my links with the developing movement of socialism, finding in the process a place in the Communist Party. For a while I was a member of the All India Congress Committee—in those days, Congress was more a platform than a party—but my estrangement from what for want of a less imprecise term must be called Gandhism was fairly complete. I have never found it in myself, however, to airily and superiorly disparage it, even as I have differed most sharply. In the Indian context it is an idea that has indeed become a force, and it cannot, in the name of scientific thinking, be brushed simply aside.

To my mind it has very basic errors, but it has had value nevertheless and is by no means entirely spent. Properly evaluated, it may still make a contribution towards humanising the mechanism of social change.

Perhaps I should add that I have met Gandhiji to speak to only twice—once at the time of the Simla conference in 1945, about release of long-term political prisoners, and another time in 1947, when he was in Calcutta to heal the wounds of communal conflict. I have had other opportunities, but I let them pass; I have always thought it a trifle vulgar to obtrude on the great. I refer to my two meetings only, however, to record an impression that he alone has left on my mind. Never have I met another who in spite of the animation on his face was so much at peace with himself and who could still, as it were, the tumult in the soul of others. I did not have with him any but more or less inconsequential conversation, but I could feel his very serenity.

If, therefore, I write on Gandhiji I do so with great respect and yet with a conviction of divergence. I cannot, and do not wish to, deny the light that is on his name, but I cannot also be blind to the grave limitations in his thought and his work. The country to-day is run by people who profess to be his political legatees, who can be expected to wish to act as he would have wanted them to. Their default in this regard is plain, but the reasons for it are generally clouded over. *Sarvodaya* which some of his disciples offer as the answer to India's and the world's needs and as the quintessence of his thought, lacks also a grasp of the changing realities of modern life and requires, in any case, a serious examination which is usually not given it. To-day a new generation to whom his name is a legend, already rather shadowy, takes his greatness for granted and goes its own way of trial and error. All this is unfair both to Gandhi and to his epoch. And so, if in our mythology a deity could be contemplated even from the angle of hostility perhaps Gandhi and his work can be best studied from the viewpoint of criticism, avoiding both cheap anathema and easy apotheosis.

CHAPTER II

Early Glimmerings

Acharya Kripalani who, unlike most of Gandhi's entourage, has written on him with penetration and wit, once remarked that Gandhi did not belong to the great ones of history who were as if born to their mission in life. He evolved continuously, reacted to particular situations, saw little more than a measureable distance ahead, and acted, when he did, with decision. As a student, either at school in Gujerat or at the Inns of court in London, he showed no particular brilliance, no outstanding ability. The man who, later in life, built heroes out of clay, had his own indubitable greatness built also out of the common earth—built not so much on the basis of *a priori* apprehension of reality and attitudes towards it but of circumstances, usually unforeseen, to which he reacted with a native strength of character. Even to politics which for long years he dominated and transfused with his light, he drifted by accident and was not drawn by innate inclination. If the gods wanted a joke, they could have made of him a commonplace and somewhat eccentric lawyer.

Much must not, however, be made of this. Except in the sphere of the arts, very few can be said to be born great—and all, including those who are born so to speak with the creative fire in their bones, need sustenance and strength from their environment. Gandhi, besides, was neither in himself nor in his family, exactly ordinary. His father was a regional celebrity, and as *Dewan* of Porbandar and then, for a while, of Rajkot, was surely an influential and comparatively speaking, a prosperous person. Even after his death, the family could scrape together enough to send Gandhi, when he was only nineteen, to qualify as a barrister in London. On Indian standards, he had in his early youth a great deal more from life than is the portion of our common people. The piteous fact, however, is that few of us return our debt to society, and if Gandhi had chosen the humdrum successes of life on a petty plane, there could have been no surprise.

In his early years, Gandhi displayed certain unspectacular but potentially powerful qualities. Born (October 2, 1869) within sound of the sea, a certain mysticism had perhaps entered his composition—a mysticism which, in later life, linked with a vivid practical sense to make the most formidable of all combinations. As in the case of most Indians his mother's influence was particularly strong, and her simple faith and cheerful practice of austerity made a deep impression. From his father he inherited a certain courage and doggedness, a love of truth and unconcern for money. He had a capacity for hard work, with a penchant for detail, and while he seemed to have no sparkle and no aesthetic sensitivity, he had sincerity and the spirit of confessing wrongs which, though apparently naive, betokened latent strength. He had glimmerings of patriotic passion in boyhood—witness his being inveigled into sinful meat-eating in order that he might match the foreigner's strength and help make India free—but it was not a steady fire, nor very consuming either, for in England, where the passion should presumably have risen, he settled down to the tritest of ambitions, which included little more than being a successful man of the world. Except for his scrupulous adherence to vegetarianism and abstention in England from certain sensuous pleasures which his mother had banned, no particularly positive aspect of his mind can be noticed during his stay abroad.[1] He seemed to be a very limited young man whom life would soon docket into an undistinguished hole. It is notable that even later, in 1908, when he had made more than a big noise in South Africa, his sense of the sorrows of subjection was tepid; he says, of this period, that he had met "all the Indian anarchists in London" and felt that their "zeal was misguided". Perhaps one can also recall that Jawaharlal Nehru, on whom his mantle has fallen, was also particulary unimpressed by the doings, undoubtedly courageous, of Indian "revolutionaries" like Dhingra and Savarkar abroad in the first decade of this century. Nehru, however, never could bring himself to idealise the British Empire, which Gandhi did not hesitate to do.

In July 1891, even before he was twenty-two, Gandhi returned to India as a full-fledged barrister and got himself enrolled in the Bombay High Court. He was not enough yet

of a social rebel, and perfomed the ceremony of purification to assuage the anger of the orthodox members of his community who equated his journey abroad with sin. He was already a father, his son being then about four years of age. As usual with England-returned folk those days, he introduced his family to European clothes and oatmeal porridge, and would in all likelihood have slided into the usual grooves of banality, except perhaps for contacts with a virile personality like Rajchandra Ravibhai, at once a poet and businessman, with a fund of spiritual strength and goodness, who, somewhat as Gandhi's mother had done, called him back to values that might have dwindled and gone in the new set-up of his life.

It was a good job for India and the world that success did not come to him in the profession of law. At Bombay he fumbled over his first brief and losing nerve, advised his client to get another counsel. Returning disheartened to Rajkot he did odd drafting work, was morally worried over the problem of 'touts' who seemed indispensable to practice, and got his first taste of English *hauteur* when the political agent whom he wanted to interview on behalf of his brother, had him thrown out by "just enough force"—a proceeding which made him think of suing the *sahib*, but he was dissuaded from such presumption by no less a Congress leader of those days than Sir Pherozeshah Mehta.[2] The iron had not yet entered Gandhi's soul, but it had made its appearance. Perhaps he was not very easily shaken, but he had in him the obstinacy of studiedly gentle people—once roused, he would never turn back.

That awakening from quiescence took place in South Africa, where he went on a legal commission welcome, indeed after his failure at home. Two years of struggle in a corrupt and unpropitious atmosphere was ended, luckily for him and his countrymen, by an offer which came from the firm of Dada Abdulla to instruct and assist counsel in an important suit before South African courts, and in April 1893, he sailed for Durban. His life's first climacteric was now approaching.

When he reached South Africa, Gandhi was barely twenty-four years of age, buffeted already by life's petty vagaries but yet untroubled by much abstract thought, injured in his pride but not yet stirred out of a certain torpor, endowed unaware

with a fund of spiritual strength which needed a real impact to flow out visibly. But things happened to him in South Africa which meant a kind of baptism by sorrow and made him, by degrees, a hero of history.

He did not, however, carry with him to South Africa any very lively consciousness of his country's political dependence. His early training had lent him a predilection for mildness, in politics as in other things—it is not without significance that the only political figure in India whom he could ever call his *guru* was Gokhale, the gentlest of men, sedate in speech and chary of all forms of extremism. The prevailing temper of Indian politics was also one of moderation and of more or less contented acquiescence in British rule. The Indian National Congress held its first sitting during Christmas week in 1885, when Gandhi was sixteen. It represented the coming to terms, as it were, of our intelligentsia with British rule. The official founder of the Congress was Alan Octavian Hume, former civil servant, whose idea was, in his own words, to provide "a safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces, generated by our own action". Official benevolence did not, of course, suddenly whisk into existence the National Congress. A movement for India-wide political articulation was in any case coming into its own, but Government wanted to make sure that it did not go out of control. And for nearly two decades after its inauguration, the Congress developed along the lines laid down by Authority. In 1885 the National Union which sponsored the Congress laid down very clearly that "unswerving loyalty to the British Crown shall be the key-note of the institution", and it was not till 1908, and then only in deference to a growing section that wanted to go much farther, that "the attainment of a system of government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire" was declared to be the objective of the Congress, "to be achieved by constitutional means by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration". Slowly broadening representative institutions, rather than unfettered self-government, was the goal of the Congress.

It will be helpful to recall a little history so that the significance of the event may be better understood. Let us go back to the battle of Plassey (June 1757), where Indian vena-

lity and British guile combined to set up the East India Company as the real power in the land. Then followed what may be called a century of despair, but our people, in the mass, the lower ten thousand rather than the upper ten, never submitted supinely, were never so enamoured of the conqueror's virtues that subjection lost its sting, never reconciled themselves to servitude. There never was a time, till 1857, when some religion or other in India was not clinging to independence. And whether it was the *dacoits,* so called by hucksters of official history (c.f. China's "bandits"); or *thugs* and *Pindaris,* many of whom were expropriated peasants rather than professional freebooters, whom it took the British larger armies to suppress than were needed against Tipu Sultan and the Marathas; or *Sanyasis,* described by Warren Hastings as "the stoutest and most active men of India", round whom Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wove his novel of xenophobia and his hymn of patriotism, the *Bande Mataram* song; or Wahabis and Farazis whom W. W. Hunter called "extreme dissenters concerning matters of faith, communists and Red Republicans in politics", some of whose leaders moved about with 80,000 men—a phenomenon "to make any landed gentry in the world indignantly uncomfortable"; or the peasants who rose in Saharanpur, in the Deccan, in Malabar, in the neighbourhood of Mysore and a hundred other places; or the aboriginal inhabitants of our land like the Santals and Kols; they struggled, with whatever means were handy, against the foreign usurper. It was not, in the full sense of the word, a national struggle, but its magnificent prolegomena.[3]

The Revolt of 1857 represented the crown and the climax of this stupendous, though often sightless, upsurge. The recent celebration of its centenary has released a flood of literature on the subject and recalled to us its mighty importance in the setting of our national struggle. Its suppression could not but lead to a heightened consciousness of damage to our self-respect as a people, and there is writ large on the post-1857 years a genuine ache for national self-assertion. There was no lack of struggle, besides, to match this ache, and it is to this that Hume himself was witness when he pored over masses of official papers relating to 1870-80 and felt aghast.

"I was shown", writes Hume, "seven large volumes containing communications from over 30,000 reporters, all going

to show that poor men were pervaded with a sense of hopelessness of the existing state of affairs, that they were convinced they would starve and die, and *they wanted to do something.* They were going to do something and stand by each other, and *that something meant violence*.....It was considered also that everywhere the small bands would coalesce into large ones, like drops of water on a leaf.....and that very soon after the bands obtained formidable proportions, *a certain number of the educated classes,* at the time desperately, perhaps unreasonably, bitter against the government, would join the movement, assume here and there the lead, give the outbreak cohesion and *direct it as a national revolt"* (Italics ours).[4]

Allowing even for some exaggeration in the fears of Hume, there is no doubt that common people were in many places ready for a fight and some of their betters were not disinclined to help them. "I could not then, and I do not now, entertain a shadow of doubt", Hume wrote, "that we were then in *extreme danger of a most terrible revolution*". His biographer, Sir William Wedderburn, once Congress President, also wrote: "Ill-starred measures of reaction, combined with Russian methods of police repression, brought *India under Lord Lytton within measureable distance of a revolutionary outbreak,* and it was only in time that Mr. Hume and his Indian advisers were inspired to intervene". (Italics ours). Evidently, even Anglo-Saxon phlegm was overwrought by the situation, and it was the keen-witted Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, patron of Hume, who found, "extremists" apart, "a considerable number of natives both able and sensible", and thought that "the fact of their supporting the government would popularise many of its acts which now have the appearance of being driven through the legislature by force." And so, at the first Congress session, Hume conducted his flock. The president, W. C. Bonnerjee, like his successors till the end of World War I, affirmed "thorough loyalty to the British Government", and the session concluded with "three cheers" for Hume, who replied by calling for "three times three cheers, and if possible thrice that" for the Queen-Empress, the latchet of whose shoes he said he was "unworthy to loose", in his happy servility.[5]

It was a far cry from the time when the Congress would

be the stormy petrel, proscribed by government, hunted down by the police, but ensconced in the people's affection. The man who was responsible, above any other, for this transformation, was Mohandas Gandhi, but as he left the Indian shores for South Africa, he knew not what the stars had in store for him. His heroes, somewhat distantly, were Dadabhai Naoroji, a great man doubtless, but no passionate patriot —"we are loyal to the backbone", he said in Calcutta as Congress president in 1886, and prescribed for every child a reverent study of Queen Victoria's Proclamation, "our Magna Carta"—and the redoubtable Sir Phirozeshah Mehta who, from the chair in 1890, said frankly that the Congress was "not the voice of the masses, but it was the duty of their educated compatriots to interpret their grievences and offer suggestions for their redress". Indeed, politics was hardly on the fringe of his mind. He had, however, a store of pity, a dislike of cant, a vague religious longing, a habit of truth-telling and holding fast to what he had decided to do—quite an inventory of assets to make up for the mediocre elements in his character. Luckily, he fell into ways of living that made him look after the assets and develop them. Repeated jolts to his soul in South Africa saved him from the banality to which a certain innate worldly wisdom might have led him. And it was in that land of torment that he found himself set irrevocably on what he called later his "experiments with truth." Inured, however, to ways of moderation which, with a humility instilled by his long religious bent, he wanted to continue unruffled, he did not see the whole of a seething, social reality. But what he saw he did with steady concentration and so acquired through his experiments in South Africa a certain wholeness that was denied more gifted people. In his very limitations, indeed, was to be found the secret of his strength.

Notes To Chapter II

[1] M. K. Gandhi, "The Story of My Experiments with Truth", *passim* ; D. G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. I *passim*.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 204.

[3] Hiren Mukerjee, "India Struggles for Freedom", pp. 36-47, and references therein.

[4] R. P. Dutt, "India Today", pp. 279-81, quoting from Sir W. Wedderburn, "Alan Octavian Hume", pp. 80-81, 101.

[5] *Ibid.* pp. 283-84.

CHAPTER III

The Making Of The Mahatma

It cannot perhaps be exactly ascertained who first spoke of Gandhi as the *Mahatma* ('Great Soul') and when, but it appears that when Jawaharlal Nehru met him for the first time in 1916, he was already known generally as such. He was called "Mahatma" at a Kathiawad reception in January, 1915, and in a letter dated February 1915, Rabindranath Tagore called him by that name. This is no wonder, for his career in South Africa is, within limitations, quite an epic, and as it became known, a deserved halo settled round his head.

The first Indians had gone to Natal in 1860 to work as indentured labourers on the sugar plantations. They were welcomed by the white colonists who found them efficient in a way that the native Africans were not. Known as "coolies", they stayed on in the country, many of them as hawkers, market-gardeners, domestic servants, etc. Later, they and their children found jobs on the railways and in the coal mines. Soon an Indian peasantry, betaking themselves to the sub-tropical coastal belt, worked small plots of land and became an important element of the population. These were followed by merchants and traders from India who carried on business, not only among their compatriots but Zulus and Europeans as well. Many of them flourished, and some even became very rich. The white colonists, however, had not bargained for it, and when they woke up to notice the Indian's unobtrusive success, began an anti-Indian campaign.

About 1893, the white settlers, now running the administration, imposed a tax of £3 a year on every Indian worker who had completed his term of indenture, the original idea having been that the tax should be £25 a year. A similar tax was levied on every Indian woman and on every child over sixteen. The average sugar workers could just about earn £3 by six months' labour on the plantations. The

impost was obviously intended to compel Indians to go back home on completion of their contracts on the sugar estates.

The population of Natal, in 1895, was roughly estimated to be a little over half a million, of whom 400,000 were Africans, 80,000 Indians, and 40,000 whites. Indians were excluded from the franchise. By an ironic arrangement, only the white males had the vote though the franchise was not explicitly on the basis of race. If Africans could pass certain "civilisation tests", they could become voters, but not more than two or three could ever qualify. For several decades, it is learnt, there was only one African voter.

In Natal, Indians could, in spite of difficulties, establish themselves with some effect, but in the Transvaal they had little success. Under a law of 1885, Indians were disqualified from either owning land or being citizens of the Transvaal Republic. Once they went to make a representation to President Kruger who did not so much as admit them into his house but kept them standing in his courtyard. When he condescended to see them, he cut them short as they spoke of their being good citizens entitled to certain minimum rights, and snapped : "You are the descendants of Ishmael and therefore from your very birth bound to slave for the descendants of Esau. As the decendants of Esau we cannot admit you to rights placing you on an equality with ourselves. You must rest content with what rights we grant to you". Of this declaration, Gandhi wrote later, characteristically, that it was not "inspired by malice or anger", for Kruger had been brought up since childhood on Old Testament stories which he implicitly believed.[1] However, the Indians so admonished by the Boer leader must have gone back from the meeting, bewildered and humiliated.

When a few years later, British troops marched into the Transvaal and hoisted the Union Jack in Pretoria, Indians perhaps hoped that things would be better. Lord Lansdowne, Lord Selborne and other high functionaries of the British Government had declared that the treatment accorded to Indians by the Boers was one of the causes of the war. That this was hypocritical and false became clear very soon. There was wide expectation that the old laws of the Boer Republic directed against Indians would no longer be enforced. Auctioneers who before the war refused bids from Indians for

the purchase of land, now accepted them, and large sums of money thus changed hands. The revenue registration officers, however, invoking the Boer laws of 1885, turned down such purchases. The Asiatic Department in Pretoria was seen to be, in Gandhiji's own words, "merely a frightful engine of oppression for the Indians". From London, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the colonies, came on a visit and gave a characteristic exhibition of sanctimoniousness, treating Indian representation with scant courtesy. In 1906, the Transvaal was granted responsible government, and Britain exploited the situation further to repudiate both responsibility and authority to prevent discrimination against Indians. Laws were passed immediately to restrict entry of Indians. A most humiliating pass law—"the dog's collar" law, as some Europeans put it—was introduced, in addition to other measures for stopping Indian immigration. This was how the white population of the Transvaal celebrated the new measure of freedom granted them with much fanfare by the liberal Campbell-Bannerman government of Britain.

The status of Indians was no better in the Free State and in Cape colony, but it was against the Transvaal restrictions as well as against the poll tax in Natal that Gandhi directed his celebrated passive resistance which he later decided to call *satyagraha*—a concept which, under that mantle, has since made the tour of the world.

When Gandhi, immaculately clad, as he used to think he should be, as a member of the English Bar, landed at Durban —"with a due sense", he writes, "of my own importance"—his idea was to go back home after a year or so. Experiences, loaded with bitterness, then crowded on him—humiliations in court where he had imagined his barristership a shield, hardships and insults in railway trains, difficulties in securing hotel or other accommodation, and "thrashings", no less, now and again, when he presumed to take for granted the elementary rights of man. Just as excruciating, no doubt, was the discovery that Indians in South Africa, bent on their own avocations, had reconciled themselves to disgrace, acquiesced in cruel wrongs and lost all sensitivity, for otherwise life was impossible. In the crucible of such experience was his character fashioned till its glow illumined the South African gloom.

"I observed on the very first day that the Europeans meted out most insulting treatment to the Indians.....I was pushed out of the train by a police constable at Maritzburg, and the train having left, was sitting in the waiting room, shivering in the bitter cold. I did not know where my luggage was nor did I dare to inquire of anybody, lest I might be insulted and assaulted once again. Sleep was out of the question. Doubt took possession of my mind. Late at night, I came to the conclusion that to run back to India would be cowardly. I must accomplish what I had undertaken".[2]

These are Gandhi's own words, quietly spoken but with a storm of meaning in them. That episode in the railway station at Maritzburg, indeed, bears comparison with the "illumination" that came to Rousseau at Valenciennes. Ejection from the train and assault by the coach-driver may seem trivial incidents, for such indignity and pain was being inflicted on many as a matter of course. But a shrinking and sensitive young man endured it with a fortitude that came to him as he realised he must do it for the sake not only of himself but of other people. It was the dawn in his mind of the conviction, that grew as he toiled on in South Africa, that suffering can be used creatively for the emancipation of people other than oneself. Years later, Gandhi would say : "I must involve in my own experiment the whole of my kind". At Maritzburg, his discovery was not complete, but it was there that he was born again, so to speak, into a life that was to be lived on a different level.

Details of the work that engrossed him for nearly two decades can be read in D. G. Tendulkar's eight-volume biography or better still, in Gandhi's own review of "Satyagraha in South Africa", not to mention the host of other books on the subject. Here only a few salient references need be made. His ways of work—and of his mind—should, however, be noted. The Maritzburg experience gave him, no doubt, a deep spiritual shake-up. It gave him the first release from the bonds of fear—*abhaya*, as our ancients called it, not merely physical courage but the positive absence of fear from the mind. This quality of fearlessness, rather than the more widely publicised notion of *ahimsa*, non-violence, was Gandhi's greatest contribution to Indian life—fearlessness of State repression and of social obloquy, fearlessness in respect not

only of the coercive machinery of the State, but of landlords and moneylenders and vested interests, fearlessness even in face of starvation and sorrow. Fear's black pall could not, of course, be removed in a trice—the psychological change would need conscious nursing—but let it be repeated, *abhaya* rather than *ahimsa* was Gandhi's legacy to his people. Glimpses of that *abhaya* must have warmed his soul in the agony of Maritzburg, but characteristically, Gandhi needed greater assurance through further experience. For some time, even, the illumination seemed to have left him; with his always limited approach, he thought his immediate duty, that of performing his legal commission, so important that he did little, during the first year of his stay, for taking up seriously the question of Indian grievances in South Africa. "I could see", he wrote later, "that trying to do both would ruin both". So in spite of further beatings and insults, as when he was pushed without warning into the gutter by a policeman for walking past the footpath along the house of President Kruger, he was leaving for India in 1894 with no thought of coming back again. It was at his farewell meeting in Durban that news came of the Government's bill to disfranchise Indians, and on the importunity of his hosts he agreed to defer his departure, first for a month and then indefinitely. Later also in his great career we shall see him refusing to look farther ahead than he must—it was a queer demon which possessed him, steady and not fiery, moderating his pace and showing him no more than a fragment of the way ahead.

For sometime he was content with unspectacular work—drawing up a petition for the legislature, for example, though collecting ten thousand signatures was an achievement. He began to practise, after the inevitable attempt of the Law Society to keep the dark man out. He took the initiative in forming, in May 1894, the Natal Indian Congress, and delighted in the tasks of persuading people of all denominations to join the organisation as a sort of political training in itself. At this time was also set up the Natal Indian Educational Association which helped the good work. There were in the Transvaal and Cape Colony bodies similar to the Natal Indian Congress, but preferring one job at a time, he did not try or even think of linking them all. The subscription was fixed too high, it seems, at £3 per year, the same as in the

tax on indentured labourers, while many members paid £12 in the year and some half a dozen £24. In a month, three hundred members were enrolled, but obviously Gandhi at the time wanted a limited membership. His idealism, then as always, ran in guarded and what he thought feasible channels. This stir in Indian circles created an impression and Lord Ripon, the liberal Colonial Secretary, disallowed the Disfranchising Bill. And in 1896, Gandhi returned to India to collect his wife and children, with no idea yet of what was in store for him and his people in South Africa.

During his six months in India, Gandhi met many Indian celebrities, of whom Gokhale alone overwhelmed him with the force of his character, and sought to make the Indians' problems in South Africa known at home. An urgent summons took him back again to Natal, but he discovered on arrival a terrific European campaign against him, whose aim was to prevent him landing, or if he did, to spirit him away and beat him up. The reason for the wrath of the whites was that they had found Gandhi to be more of a nuisance than they thought he was. Reuters had cabled to South Africa summaries of Gandhi's speeches in India which, though basically not incorrect, distorted and exaggerated them. Furious at the presumption of such propaganda, the South African whites wanted to teach Gandhi the lesson of his life.

The boat in which Gandhi had travelled was detained in port for more than three weeks, and then permission was given the passengers, of whom some three to four hundred were Indians, to land in Durban. Gandhi himself was advised not to disembark till after dark, and then only in the company of a police officer. He agreed to the arrangement, but when a European friend advised him not to accept the humiliation of landing with a police escort like a thief in the night, and offered to accompany him, he preferred that course. He was, of course, recognised on the streets and set upon by a mob that nearly lynched him. The European friend was torn away from him, and Gandhi escaped lynching only because a European lady, wife of the police superintendent, protected him with her umbrella and her presence. On the way he passed the police station where he was offered asylum, but he refused. After he reached, however, the house of a friend,

Parsi Rustomji, a large mob gathered in front and demanded that he be handed over to them. The police superintendent, one of those good samaritans who proved that every white man was not a frenzied maniac, harangued the crowd and while holding its attention, arranged that Gandhi be disguised, and with policeman also disguised leave the premises for the safety of the police station. Gandhi, with his penchant for an embarrassing obstinacy, might have declined the disguise, but with an unusual discretion, he did not, and the situation was saved. The crowd, repeatedly assured by the police superintendent that Gandhi was not in that house, broke in too late to find that the bird had flown. Perhaps a last-minute dawn of humour helped the predicament, for the laugh was on the crowd and the police officer had won his gamble. It needs also some humour to appreciate Gandhi's earlier refusal of shelter in the police station and his consent later to wearing a disguise—which he normally would never imagine doing—for saving an impossible situation. Even saints, prickly with principles, must on occasion bow to life's ironic exigencies.

The police authorities took no steps, however, to prosecute his assailants, till they received a telegram from Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, instructing them to do so. Gandhi, however, refused to support the prosecution; with the charity which he thought should permeate all his actions, he conceded that the mob had reasons of its own to be excited and so to do something wrong. Besides, he had determined not to go to court for redress of any wrong inflicted individually upon him. It was a pity, for the mob of enraged whites had wronged not him so much as the entire Indian community. It was perhaps also a pity that he sought to explain to Europeans that Reuter reports of his speeches in India were distorted versions—such explanations were not deserved by those to whom he offered them, and conditions in South Africa were too bad for extenuation by studiedly moderate statements.

Soon after these incidents there broke out the Anglo-Boer War, and it provided a significant revelation how Gandhi's philosophy worked out in practice. The Boers were a very limited people, wedded to Old Testament morality, "eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth,"—which did not pre-

vent Gandhi, however, from giving them "unstinted praise of their bravery, their love for liberty and their self-sacrifice." When the war began it was plain that it was more for the sake of the gold mines than for anything else, though of course reasons were given, among them the palpably hypocritical British pretence that Boer discrimination against Indians had persuaded them to fight. "It must be largely conceded," said Gandhi, "that justice is on the side of the Boers," but with a cuteness hardly to be credited to one of his moral fibre, he argued : "If we desire to win our freedom and achieve our welfare as members of the British Empire, here is a golden opportunity for us to do so by helping the British in the war by all the means at our disposal . . . . The authorities may not always be right, but so long as the subjects owe allegiance to a state, it is their clear duty generally to accommodate themselves, and accord their support, to acts of the state." He knew he was on very tenuous ground, and to salve, as it were, his own conscience he added that no paramount moral problem was involved in the situation—"a moral crisis is not before us and no one says that we wish to hold aloof from this war for any such universal and comprehensive reason."

In fairness to Gandhi it must be stated that he set out himself arguments, valid to many, that he had to counter. There were among his colleagues at the time people who felt that the British had no special claim to preference over the Boers, and that Indians, "a community of slaves," should rather help a small nation like the Boers fighting with tenacity and courage to preserve their freedom. Gandhi refuted this argument, chiefly on the plea, which seems a little forced, that the Indians' "existence in South Africa is only in our capacity of British subjects," that "what little rights we still retain, we retain because we are British subjects," that in spite of being "helots in the Empire," leaders in India and in South Africa "have tried to better our condition, continuing the while to remain in the Empire," that if moral principles were involved, it would have been a religious obligation to try, even at the risk of life, to dissuade the government from pursuing a course" and "we have done nothing of the kind." It was an argument compounded of principle and ingenuity in a manner which does not evoke respect, but the main reason for Gandhi's

dialectics was the fixation he had already acquired about the British Empire. Writing in 1924, he said : "Even to-day I do not see any reason to modify (the arguments), that is to say, if I had to-day the faith in the British Empire which I then entertained and if I now cherished the hope, which I did at that time, of achieving our freedom under its aegis." Much after 1924, however, his soft corner for the British Empire persisted, producing many a politico-moral enigma.

Indians, thus, were persuaded by Gandhi to support the British in the war. Being political pariahs, however, "we encountered formidable difficulties in getting our offer favourably entertained" by Government. In the end, an Indian ambulance corps was formed. Indian stretcher-bearers, and others like the 'coolie' Parbhusingh who risked his life for hours on end to save the lives of the besieged at Ladysmith, proved invaluable to the British; they were mentioned in despatches and awarded medals.[3]

The British Government chose to reward Indian loyalty with perfidious disavowal of all implied assurances against discrimination. Gandhi had returned to India and set up practice in Bombay, but was called back soon enough, for the situation was taking a turn for the worse. He re-entered the Transvaal in 1903, opened his office in Johannesburg, and busied himself with resisting the inroads of the Asiatic Department. The earlier anti-Asiatic laws were now sought to be made, sometimes by legal strategem, more severe and systematic. The casuistical arguments of a so-called philosopher-statesman like General Smuts buttressed the fanaticism of vested European interests. Gandhi thought 'satyagraha' demanded appreciation of varieties of standpoint and cogitated over the validity or otherwise of the arguments of the whites. He could not bring himself to concede their validity, but even so, Indians under his guidance consented to change their permits for new ones (with photographs) and agreed that fresh Indian immigrants should take out permits in the new form—thus conceding their status of unwanted inferiors. It was, Gandhi wrote later himself, a "great act of courtesy", and "the reward of gentleness" was the Black Act of 1906, which goaded the Indian community to the greatest-yet struggle so far.

It was in this period when attempts were maturing to impose further disabilities on Indians in the Transvaal that

certain events happened which emphasised the Gandhi enigma. The Bambata rebellion in 1906 was essentially an African revolt against the hated poll tax, and as such quite comparable to the struggle of Indians against discriminatory laws. Gandhi, however, remained a loyal adherent of the British Empire and as in the case of the Boer war, offered his services and those of the Indian community to the government. Once again, an Indian ambulance corps was formed. No doubt, his action helped individual Africans; the whites had no desire to minister to wounded Zulus, and there were practically no European wounded; without the Indian stretcher-bearers the Zulus would probably have been left to die. But politically, Gandhi and the Indian community, preferring perhaps a wise discretion to difficult moral valour, left Africans in the lurch. The war against Bambata was a ruthless proceeding, characteristic of empire building; the slaughter was carried on with machine guns against spears and shields. To proclaim the majesty of white people, vindictive punishments were given; hundreds of Africans were sentenced to flogging. Indians ministered, indeed, to the festering sores on their bodies, but did nothing to touch their souls. Tendulkar, Gandhi's voluminous biographer, gives less than a page to this incident. "Gandhi had doubts about the 'rebellion' itself, but he believed that the British Empire existed for the welfare of the world . . . . On reaching the scene of the rebellion, Gandhi realized that it was in fact a no-tax campaign. His sympathies now were with the Zulus . . . . The Zulu 'rebellion' was an eye-opener to Gandhi. He saw the naked atrocities of the whites against the poor sons of the soil.....Marching through the hills and dales of Zululand, Gandhi often fell into deep thought. Two ideas which had been floating in his mind became fixed. First, an aspirant after a life exclusively devoted to service must lead a life of celibacy. Secondly, he must accept voluntary poverty."[4] It is difficult to make head or tail of this rigmarole. In the massive literature of Gandhiana, there is hardly a word that lashes at British atrocities on the simple and courageous Zulus; there is not a hint of understanding of the character of imperialism. On the contrary, if Tendulkar's assessment is credible, Gandhi's travail in Zululand made him think, above all, of celibacy and poverty as aids to a life of service; they no doubt are in many cases,

but where, one sighs, are Gandhiji's reactions to the human tragedy he saw from so near?

Even such pathetic "loyalty" did not dull the edge of European vengefulness, and in August, 1906, the Transvaal Government enjoined that every Indian "coolie", Arab or Turk, of eight years or upwards, entitled to reside in the Transvaal, must register with the authorities, give the finger and thumb impression, and take out a pass carefully made out, the application, on pain of sentence, to be made at once. The pass must be always carried on one's person and exhibited anywhere when called upon by a policeman. In effect, the Indian was by the new law degraded to the level of the pass-carrying African.

Indians in Johannesburg were deeply perturbed and immediately responded with a mass meeting in the Empire Theatre where Gandhi presided. At this meeting the famous 'Satyagraha' oath was taken—till about this time, passive resistance was the usual expression, but now Gandhi, helped by his nephew Maganlal's suggestion of *Sadagraha* ('firmness in a good cause') had a brain-wave and the term 'Satyagraha' was born. All those present took a vow that they would not apply for registration certificates and that they would passively resist all attempts of the authorities to enforce the 'Black Act.' To an inspired assemblage Gandhi averred: "I can boldly declare, and with certainty, that so long as there is even a handful of men true to their pledge, there can only be one end to the struggle, and that is victory." Similar meetings were held everywhere and pledges taken, and the chief subject of discussion in Gandhi's "Indian Opinion" was the Black Ordinance.

In company with a colleague, Gandhi repaired to London to try to persuade the British Government to veto the measure, since the Transvaal was a Crown colony and subject to control from London. He interviewed the Colonial Secretary, Lord Elgin, whose promise to withdraw the Act was conveyed to him when he was returning to South Africa. Britain's "crooked policy"— it is Gandhi's own phrase—soon, however, came into play. In January, 1907, the new Transvaal constitution began to operate and the first Transvaal Parliament immediately clamped down the law. The British Government refused to intervene, Lord Elgin complacently affirming that a

self-governing State had "the right to go to the devil in its own way."

Thus, for the second time, the Black Act became law in July 1907. The movement, however, ran high. Satyagrahis picketed the permit offices and there were hardly any registrations. As always, the authorities complained of coercion, but the pickets offered no violence and if there was what might be called moral pressure, surely it was no wrong. Government tried to circumvent the picketing campaign and permitted registration in Indian homes. Even so, no more than 500 out of some 13,000 Transvaal Indians registered. Gandhi, and Leung Quin, leader of the Chinese who as Asiatics came within the ambit of the Act and had joined the movement, were brought to court and ordered, on refusal to register, to leave the country. They refused to go. Government then took recourse to sterner measures. The jails were soon full, for Gandhi and other satyagrahis were arrested and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. There were, of course, some bogus people among them. As a matter of fact, the first satyagrahi prisoner, a man who passed for a *pandit* from upper India, proved to be an impostor. The Chinese supported the movement with great heart, but their leader was unworthy of them. Prison was a trial, however, in which the satyagrahis, by and large, triumphed. And the authorities, afraid of the organised strength of a usually docile community, began to waver.

Then followed incidents which show, at once, Gandhi's strength and weakness. General Smuts, of whose casuistry Gandhi already had some experience, proposed that the Indians should register voluntarily. If the majority agreed to do so, he would, he promised, repeal the Act. The matter was referred to Gandhi, for the Indians outside jail would not act except under his direction. Gandhi was taken from jail to Smuts' office. Smuts was polite, even pleasant. He told Gandhi that the Act would be repealed as soon as a majority of the Indians registered voluntarily. With his readiness for compromise, a trait which he thought essential to the satyagraha spirit, Gandhi accepted the understanding. The interview ended with Smuts' admonition that there must not be "many meetings and demonstrations" over the issue, and Gandhi assured him that only meetings for explaining the settlement terms would be held. He left Smuts' office a free

man—orders for other releases were to be issued next morning—and Gandhi who had come straight from prison and had no money on him was given his railway fare to Johannesburg by Smuts' secretary. Gandhi obviously was taken in by the spurious atmosphere of friendliness and was quite unprepared for the perfidy that was to follow.

It was difficult, naturally, for Gandhi to convince his followers. After all, the Act had not been withdrawn, and those who had taken the satyagraha oath had vowed not to register under any circumstances—none other than Gandhi himself had firmly reiterated the bounden nature of the oath which, once taken, must not be violated. Gandhi's arguments were somewhat rarefied: there was no need to insist on prior abrogation of the Act, for Government could reimpose it, and "we are fearless and free, so long as the weapon of satyagraha is in our hands"; the community will not lose, but gain, by compromise, for "when our opponents recognise our humility and sense of justice, they would give up or at least mitigate their opposition"; "we must register voluntarily in order to show that we do not intend to bring a single Indian into the Transvaal surreptitiously or by fraud." Gandhi's prestige won its way at the midnight Johannesburg meeting of about a thousand people, and only a few Pathans continued to dissent. It was decided that Gandhi was to be the first to register.

Next day, on his way to the registry, he was attacked by a group of Pathans, led by Mir Alam, who shouted that Gandhi had betrayed them. He was severely injured, but even as he was laid up in bed in the home of a baptist missionary who wrote later on his life in South Africa, the Rev. Joseph Doke, he insisted on being still the first to register, and calling the officer to his bedside, gave his fingerprints.

Then followed events which confirmed the doubts of those of Gandhi's followers who had been difficult to convince. Smuts did not keep his promise. The Black Act was not repealed. Instead, it was stated that those who had already registered would be exempted from further registration but the others would be subject to the law, including all Indians who should come to the Transvaal in future. In his history of satyagraha in South Africa, Gandhi calls this performance of Smuts "a breach of faith," but with an exaggerated sense of fairness to one's opponent puts a question mark against the phrase.

There could be no question, however, about the perfidy. And the struggle just had to be renewed. The Indians now demanded of Government that within a specific date the law be repealed or they would publicly burn their passes and start a movement.

In August 1908, a great meeting at Johannesburg saw the spectacular burning of the passes. The time-limit mentioned in the Indians' communication to Government gave it the character of an ultimatum. Gandhi weighed its pros and cons and accepted it after hesitation as being in tune with satyagraha—a recognition, no doubt, of the strength of feeling behind the demand. As the smoke curled up, Mir Alam, Gandhi's Pathan assailant, came on to the platform and shook his hand. A correspondent of the London *Daily Mail* compared the meeting with that of the Boston Tea Party which heralded the American War of Independence. Even Gandhi, who disapproved of the 'violence' of the American colonists, thought the comparison did no more than justice to the Indians, a mere 13000 of whom had challenged the powerful government of the Transvaal with only one weapon, a faith in the righteousness of their cause.

Government's reply to the revival of passive resistance was the Transvaal Immigrants' Restriction Bill which aimed at making it impossible for Indians, with very rare exceptions, to enter that province. The satyagrahis determined also to oppose the measure. Individually and in groups, Indians openly entered the Transvaal in defiance of the new law. To the movement came not only the poor, anonymous heroes who, always and everywhere, make the world go round, but honest intellectual types and businessmen. A group of the latter, led by Parsi Rustomji, were arrested and ordered to leave the Transvaal within a week, but they proceeded instead to Pretoria where they had to be arrested again. Deported to Natal, they at once crossed the border again and were then sentenced to three months' hard labour.

It was useless for Government to deport satyagrahis to Natal, for they came back again. In desperation, they began deporting satyagrahis to India, including even some who had been born in South Africa and knew no home in India. On this, however, there was a furore in India, where the government passed a law prohibiting further migrations of indentured

labourers to Natal, a measure which the Natal whites, for all their hostility to the Indians, did not relish.

The movement dragged on for years, and Gandhi and his comrades spent much of their time in jail. Meanwhile, the Union of South Africa had come into being, and the redoubtable Smuts was its first Minister of Justice. A fresh crisis cropped up in 1913 when the Supreme Court decided that in South Africa only Christian marriages were legal, thus degrading, legally, the Indian women to the status of concubines. This savage thrust brought Indian women into the fight, and they proved their mettle not only by readiness for suffering, the badge indeed of their tribe, but by throwing off the shackles that tied them to the drudgery of merely household chores.

There was a proletarian side to the movement, which is usually unnoticed, but while perhaps less spectacular than Gandhi's imprisonments and fastings, it was just as effective in its impact on the administration. Indian labourers in Natal had begun to take strike action against the £3 poll tax. It was led in the main by an Indian Christian, A. Christopher.[5]

Gandhi was associated more closely with another working class demonstration, the big strike of Indian workers in the Newcastle coal mines. They were indignant at the treatment accorded to a group of women resisters who had marched to the Transvaal, where they were arrested and sentenced to hard labour. A large band, no less than 2000 people, the Newcastle miners forming the nucleus, marched, with Gandhi in the lead, towards Volksrust. There were women among them, with babes in arms, of whom two died during the march. All the demonstrators were arrested when they crossed into the Transvaal. It was notable, however, that this time white sympathisers had openly come forward, and two of Gandhi's friends in Johannesburg, Kallenbach and Henry Polak, found themselves in prison. Strikes of Indian workers broke out throughout Natal. They were ruthlessly suppressed, miners being sent back as prisoners to the mines and compelled to work under white foremen armed for the purpose. The mines were surrounded with barbed wire—a country beleaguered against its own people.

By this time it was plain that Government had shot its bolt. A world-wide storm of indignation forced it to a retreat. In December 1913, the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, made

a speech in Madras severely criticising the South African Government. Smuts agreed to the appointment of a special commission of inquiry, but he treated with disdain the Indian demand for the appointment to it of impartial members. Gandhi was not, as usual with him, keen for a fight if a settlement could be reached, and advices from India, brought him personally by C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson who represented Gokhale, were for caution. There was the possibility of a great new Indian movement coinciding, perhaps even merging, with a big strike of the European employees of the Union Railways, which had already made the position of government extremely delicate. One might expect that here was an opportunity of collaboration in a just cause of white and coloured people, an opportunity welcome, presumably, to the satyagraha spirit. Gandhi, however, thought very differently. He said that Indians could not assist the railway strikers, for they were not out to harass the government and exploit its predicament! This won him credit in British circles as well as in Smuts' entourage, and Gandhi thought by "self-suffering" alone and by a "self-imposed courtesy and chivalry," satyagrahis would justify themselves and achieve their goal. It is, to plain thinking, somewhat knotted and obscure, when he says, for example : "In every step that he takes, the satyagrahi is bound to consider the position of the adversary". He was fighting less for success in the cause than for testing his faith.

The commission, in spite of its composition, asked for abolition of the £3 poll tax and restoration of the legal status of Indian married women. The government acted on the recommendations, and the Transvaal Indian pass law was also repealed. Meanwhile, besides, Gandhi had reached an agreement with Smuts, the latter intimating that he had already decided on releasing the prisoners but that Indian grievances like the poll tax and the stigma on non-Christian marriages must await publication and consideration of the commission's recommendations. In spite of this attitude, Gandhi made with Smuts a provisional agreement and for the last time, satyagraha was suspended. Lively fears were expressed by his colleagues in view of Smuts' previous record of betrayal. Gandhi's reply was characteristic : "No matter how often a satyagrahi is betrayed, he will repose his trust in the adversary

so long as there are not cogent grounds for distrust. Pain to a satyagrahi is the same as pleasure. He will not therefore be misled by the mere fear of suffering into groundless distrust." "Distrust is a sign of weakness, and satyagraha implies the banishment of all weakness and therefore of distrust, which is clearly out of place when the adversary is not to be destroyed but only won over."

On July 18, 1914, Gandhi sailed for England, to see the ailing Gokhale, *en route* to India, after twentyone years of unremitting and extraordinary labour. Had that mountain of labour produced a mole hill? There had been no end put to the persecution of Indians in South Africa. Discrimination in the Transvaal continues to this day. In Natal the Indians' right to acquire land is limited to certain coastal strips. From the Orange Free State they are completely excluded. In the Cape they share the political disabilities of the coloured people. "One feels for a moment", wrote Gandhi himself, "as if all this suffering had gone for nothing, or is inclined to question the efficacy of satyagraha as a solvent of the problems of mankind." He answered his doubts, of course, by averring that without that great struggle "the Indians today would have been hounded out of South Africa". He regretted also that the position of Indians there has deteriorated on account of the absence of satyagrahis among them. Whatever may be thought of this view, the fact remains that the events of 1913, in particular, showed the possibilities of passive resistance under a courageous and patient leadership. Factors other than satyagraha played their part, no doubt, but Gandhi's role as one who could move mountains and rouse the hearts of men shines through the record of those days.

At his farewell meeting in Johannesburg, Gandhi made a speech which perhaps exasperates a reader today but was very characteristic: ".....the value of the settlement, if they were to examine it, would consist not in the intrinsic things they had received, but in the sufferings and the sorrows long drawn out that were necessary in order to achieve those things.....what was there to gloat over in having an intolerable burden removed, which might have been removed years ago? What was there in a lawful wife's being recognised in a place like South Africa?.....Behind that struggle for concrete rights lay the great spirit which asked for an abstract

principle, and the fight which was undertaken in 1906, although it was a fight against a particular law, was a fight undertaken in order to combat the spirit that was seen about to overshadow the whole of South Africa and to undermine the glorious British Constitution.....keep that Constitution in tact, and they held him bound a slave to that Constitution....."[6] One might recall how at the time of the Boer War, Gandhi's support to the British made an Englishman write in a leading newspaper a eulogistic poem with the refrain, "We are sons of the Empire after all !" Whether it was due to Gandhi's inability or unwillingness to discover the character of the British Empire or to his belief, perhaps unconsciously held, that if we were on good behaviour we could wheedle the British to extend the benefits of their Constitution to "lesser breeds without the law", this naive approach towards the tremendous fact of imperialism needs carefully to be noted.

There was, however, a uniqueness about Gandhi which the South African story stresses in every syllable of it. He went there as a barrister, very conscious of his difference from the commonalty, but Maritzburg gave him a new revelation. Slowly, and sometimes in spite of himself, he merged with the life of his people, subjecting himself to the discipline of work at once by hand and by brain, fighting pride and the passions till he was as much master of them as he could be, espousing poverty and a stark simplicity of living which he did not hesitate to impose on his comrades, straining with all his soul for the quality of fearlessness. The heroes he discovered in South Africa were common people, from every community, from both sexes, and from every layer of society—the Kachhalias, the Adajanias, the Nagappans and Narayanaswamis and Valliammas—a discovery that informed all his actions subsequently. He was fortunate in his European friends who must have helped him remain strikingly free even from a stealthy chauvinism. Few people, indeed, in history have so dedicated themselves to living in mankind as this stupendous Indian.

Quite a few times, of course, he deviated from principle and found excuse for it. He was a Utopian, running what he imagined were model settlements, where equality and fellow-feeling should prevail. But he was capable, at the height of enthusiastic struggle, of sudden descents into discretion, of bargains and compromises that went against the grain. This was

because he was, like all men possessed, fanatically convinced of being in the right, and you had to take him or leave him. He was in some ways the most lovable and considerate of men, but his wife seems to have had from him scantier sympathy than she deserved and when he punished with a blare of publicity minor deviations from a rigid sex-code, he was ineffectual and merely squeamish. All in all, however, he was cast in a mould that one very rarely sees, and when with his South African aureole he appeared on the Indian scene, his people hailed him spontaneously as *Mahatma*.

Notes To Chapter III

[1] M. K. Gandhi, "Satyagraha in South Africa" (Ahmedabad 1928) pp. 33-34.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 42.

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 71-79; Edward Roux, "Time Longer than Rope" (London, 1948) pp. 111-12.

[4] D. G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. I (Bombay, 1951), pp. 91-92; Gandhi, *op. cit.* pp. 97-98.

[5] Roux, *op. cit.* p. 114-15.

[6] Homer A. Jack (ed.) "The Gandhi Reader" (1956), p. 99.

CHAPTER IV

Prelude To Pre-eminence

Two days after World War I broke out, Gandhi reached London (August 4, 1914), only to find that Gokhale whom he had come to see was held up in Paris and could not travel to London for communications were suspended. He had a lot to do, however, and was soon drawn into a whirl of activity, since an Indian Congress deputation was in England in connection with the proposed reform of the Secretary of State's Council, and the question of Indian loyalty to Britain in her hour of peril was very much on the agenda. He had had a restful voyage, with such characteristic diversions as persuading his friend Kallenbach to throw into the sea a favourite binocular as a gesture of simplicity and non-possession.

In spite of what he himself called his "crankisms", he had friends and admirers in high places, and at an influentially attended London reception four days after arrival, he asked his countrymen to "think imperially and do their duty" in Britain's crisis. Even before Congress could move officially, he got together a few friends and offered their services to the war effort. The British Government accepted the offer somewhat gingerly, and Gandhi with eighty others qualified for first aid—an effort enlivened by a "miniature satyagraha" against a commanding officer who placed young English students on top of the Indians as section leaders. The strain was telling on Gandhi's health and he contracted pleurisy, which again with his characteristic incongruity he proposed to treat in his own experimental way—luckily, he was upbraided by Gokhale who had got back to London, and he was soon afterwards packed off to India. Kallenbach, happening to be a German, was interned and not permitted to accompany his ailing friend.

He was given a hero's welcome when he arrived in Bombay on January 9, 1915. The politicians who organised it found

his ways somewhat bizarre, but of course, he was a saint, and a saint in politics could be a big help in India. Gandhi, however, walked into nobody's net; he was fulsome in praise of the nation's leaders but he minded his own step till he found his own footing. When he felt physically fit, he travelled from one end of India to another, as Gokhale had advised him, but always third class, in spite of Gokhale's laughing at the idea. Till 1916 he spoke sparingly, but he was forming his own contacts and making his own arrangements. Pending the setting up of his own *ashram,* he sent Maganlal and other "Phoenix boys" to Rabindranath Tagore's *Santiniketan,* thus early forging a great friendship with the *Gurudev.* There was a quietness and method about his movements, and also a kind of worldly wisdom—he flourished even then, in spite of an ideological loneliness, in an aura of publicity. One recalls Bertrand Russell's pleasant gibe, *a propos* of Tom Paine whose greatness is nearly forgotten, that it is necessary to have a certain amount of worldly wisdom if you are going to have a reputation for lack of it.

For him and the *ashram* that he was to set up, many parts of the country staked their claim, but as a good Gujarati he chose Ahmedabad and started his *Satyagraha Ashram* at Kochrab in May 1915, whence it was removed two years later to a celebrated plot on the Sabarmati river. The inmates drawn from different parts of India shared life in common; they took the vows which Gandhi deemed essential to a life of service—truth, *ahimsa,* celibacy, control of the palate, non-stealing, non-possession, the logical corollaries being *Swadeshi* and fearlessness. It was a strenuous regimen, typified by such items as a virtual ban on milk for "having the same stimulating qualities as meat". Thanks to his nephew Maganlal's ingenuity, it was in this *ashram* that the spinning wheel, so basic in Gandhi's scheme of life, was revived. Soon after its foundation, the *ashram* admitted a family of "untouchables" —a brave act which came natural to Gandhi. Funds came to it, formally unsought, from friendly mill magnates like Ambalal Sarabhai, whose motives perhaps were a mixture of genuine regard and an expectation of service to the social order, congenial to their interests.

On June 3, 1915, in the King-Emperor's birthday honours list, two great names figured. Tagore was knighted, and

Gandhi got the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal for his services to the British Empire. Both decorations, happily for Indian self-respect, were later returned.

The war years saw in India intense political manoeuvring. Since the Surat (1907) session, Congress had been in the hands of the "moderates", but the "extremists" who were, it must be borne in mind, not particularly "extreme", were now coming back. Tilak had returned after seven years of imprisonment in far-away Mandalay, and his great renown and political acumen furthered the extremists' cause till the Congress field was left solely to them, when in mid-1918, after the Bombay special session, the moderates left to form their own Liberal Federation. The cry of "Home Rule" was popularised by Tilak and by Mrs. Besant in different ways. The latter, balked in her Home Rule mission to England, once gave a rousing war slogan : "the price of India's loyalty is India's freedom", but soon she resiled from the categoric stand and called for affirmation of India's unquestioning loyalty during the war, in the expectation, no doubt, of political rewards to follow. Tilak who will be long remembered for his great averment, "Swaraj is our birthright and we must have it", thought fit to declare, on his release, that it was "the duty of every Indian to support and assist His Majesty's Government to the best of his ability." Except for the so-called "terrorists" in Bengal and the Punjab, all political groupings, out of conviction or discreetly, stood by Britain. Later, Muslim disillusionment found expression in a ramified anti-British effort, and certain Indian revolutionaries abroad sought, by no means quixotically if the then conditions are recalled, to encompass Britain's defeat and India's liberation.

Gandhi's sympathies were with Britain and in politics he leaned towards the "moderates". Fascinated by Gokhale, he had wished to join the Servants of India Society which had for its aim the "spiritualization" of public life, and in the original preamble to its constitution laid down that "its members frankly accept the British connection as ordained in the inscrutable dispensation of Providence for India's good." The Society, however, in spite of Gokhale's sponsorship of Gandhi, thought him too unpredictable a person and would not let him in.[1] Gandhi was, indeed, as good a liberal as any of them, but in

every pore of his political being, he savoured of the masses—a failing in the eyes of "respectable" people.

Some of these latter had perhaps an idea that Gandhi was a man of high character but, in politics, a harmless crank who might be feted for a while and would then be more or less ignored. Perhaps his apparent humility also misled them, for beneath his humility were layers of steel. Ideas he expressed in *Hind Swaraj* about 'modern civilization' which he called on India to discard and about Parliaments as "emblems of slavery", must have seemed merely visionary and eccentric. His simplicity of living, his experiments with diet and nature cure, his often embarrassing forthrightness of speech and conduct, must have seemed slightly ridiculous in a man of importance. His South African career gave him an inevitable prominence, but few could prophesy, in 1915, his ascent to glory.

In February 1916, an incident happened which brought Gandhi sharply and characteristically into the limelight. He was invited to the inauguration of Benares Hindu University; the Viceroy was to lay the foundation stone and there was a whole concourse of princes and potentates, apart from celebrities in political and academic life. Gandhi went in his usual coarse rig-out, and when called on to speak, scandalised the elite by his polite but superbly blunt attack on the luxury and ostentation he saw around him. "I feel like saying to these noblemen", he said. " 'There is no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of the jewellery and hold it in trust for your countrymen in India. I am sure it is not the desire of the King-Emperor or Lord Hardinge that in order to show the truest loyalty to our King-Emperor it is necessary for us to ransack our jewellery-boxes and appear bedecked from top to toe....." Referring to detectives all over the place, he exclaimed : "Why this distrust ? Is it not better that Lord Hardinge should die than live a living death ? But, a representative of a mighty sovereign may not. He might even find it necessary to live a living death. But why was it necessary to impose these detectives on us ? We may foam, we may fret, we may resent, but let us not forget that India of today in her impatience has produced an army of anarchists. I myself am an anarchist but of a different type....."[2]

It was magnificent. Mrs. Besant, in the chair, fairly writhed. "Please stop it", she said, but relented when he told her,

"if you consider that by speaking as I am, I am not serving the country and the empire I shall certainly stop". But then, "thinking aloud" as he said he was doing, he warmed up and said : "if we are to receive self-government, we shall have to take it. We shall never be granted self-government. Look at the history of the British Empire and the British nation ; freedom-loving as it is, it will not be a party to give freedom to a people who will not take it themselves. Learn your lesson if you wish to from the Boer War. Those who were enemies of that empire only a few years ago have now become friends....." It was too much for the platform and Mrs. Besant, angered beyond endurance, stamped out. "I have never seen a president abandon a meeting," Gandhi remarked to a friend. This unfinished speech is one of the classics of eloquence—without frills, honest-to-goodness, a lashing of India's massive degradation, a cathartic masterpiece.

This was followed, on February 14, by another great speech on Swadeshi to a missionary conference in Madras. "We want to represent the masses," he said, "but we fail. They recognise us not much more than they recognise the English officers. Their hearts are an open book to neither. Their aspirations are not ours. Hence there is a break. And you witness not in reality failure to organise but want of correspondence between the representatives and the represented". He went on to speak of the poverty of the masses, of the need of self-sufficiency. "This may all sound nonsensical", he cried, "well, India is a country of nonsense. It is non-sensical to parch one's throat with thirst when a kindly Musalman is ready to offer pure water to drink. And yet thousands of Hindus would rather die of thirst than drink water from a Muslim household. These nonsensical men can also, once convinced that their religion demands that they should wear garments manufactured in India only and eat food only grown in India, decline to wear any other clothing or eat any other food....."[3] It was altogether a new voice in India's public life, the voice of a man who had risen, as it were, out of India's very earth, a man who said queer, contradictory, impossible things and yet with an urgency and a compulsion of conviction that was never encountered before.

Such a man could not help noticing people's grievances, big and small, and seeking to redress them. And he thought

that in the weapon of *satyagraha,* practised in South Africa, he had a sovereign specific. The first instance he gives of satyagraha in India relates to a comparatively minor matter. Soon after he returned home, in the middle of January 1915, he went to Rajkot and Porbandar to meet his relatives. At an intermediate station, he was told of the hardships of railway passengers on account of the notorious Viramgam customs. "Are you prepared to go to jail ?" Gandhi abruptly asked his informants and was told they were. He took up the matter, corresponded with government, spoke of a possible satyagraha agitation, and finally after a talk with the Viceroy secured removal of the customs cordon. One would not normally attach much importance to the whole proceeding, but Gandhi did. He believed that readiness for suffering had secured the desired redress.[4]

The next instance that Gandhi gives of a form of satyagraha was the agitation in 1917 against the Indian Emigration Act, which in view of public agitation was withdrawn—a more important victory than over the Viramgam issue, but its particular satyagraha aspect seems doubtful. Then came a bigger struggle, that of the Champaran peasantry against the indigo planters in North Bihar, where satyagraha had actually to be offered.

Unlike in Bengal, where in 1859-61 a movement of the peasantry in certain districts brought to an end the infamous indigo plantations run by foreign interests, North Bihar was suffering still from the ultra-feudal oppression practised on the peasantry by indigo planters. Called to help the peasant, Gandhi responded with alacrity. It was the height of what was called the Home Rule movement, but Gandhi affirmed that freeing the Champaran peasantry from the planters' shackles was work which would really establish Home Rule. He tried to teach the simple and illiterate tenants of Champaran the lesson of truth and non-violence not by speeches but by action —working unremittingly himself and making others, unused to discomfort, work without thought of self, facing persecution and even imprisonment. It was in course of this struggle that Gandhi met and worked with many people who became later his very prominent disciples—Mazhar-ul-Huq, Brijkishore Prasad, Rajendra Prasad, J. B. Kripalani, among others. He had to face stern opposition from European planters, but his

persistent exposure of the evils of the system, coupled with the determination of the peasantry to withhold their labour, could not long be resisted. Details of the fight need not be recounted, but it is notable that while Gandhi attributed success of the movement to patient changing of the heart of administration—a commission reported against the plantation system—and therefore, to the weapon only of satyagraha, he overlooked the fact that the peasantry had been, in their own way which, of course, was not entirely and always "non-violent", fighting the planters since 1907-09, that they heroically stood by him once they were convinced of his genuine concern and saw his unrelenting activity, and that the administration could not, in the all-India context of 1917, suppress the movement by main force.[5] In Champaran, in any case, Gandhi saw at close quarters the searing poverty of our people, and the iron entered no doubt deeper into his soul.

Perhaps the most significant movement so far in which Gandhi was involved was the Ahmedabad textile workers' strike (February—March 1918). There was a dispute on the issue of a daily bonus to the workers, and it was referred to arbitration, but even before arbitration could begin, the mill-owners declared a lock-out. When the mills were again opened after a lapse of some sixteen days, the weavers demanded a fifty per cent increase in wages and went on strike. After careful investigation, Gandhi trying to be the umpire persuaded the workers to accept a thirty-five per cent increase but the mill owners were adamant. He was thus honour bound to stand by the workers, and he did, but on his own characteristic conditions.

The conditions were : "never to resort to violence ; never to molest blacklegs ; never to depend on alms ; and to remain firm, no matter how long the strike continued, and to earn bread, during the strike, by any other honest labour." At a general meeting the workers pledged themselves not to resume work till their terms were accepted or the mill owners agreed to arbitration. They paraded the streets and cried : "Ek Tek, 'keep the pledge'." But on Gandhi's instructions they could have no organisation to prevent black-legging and no strike fund collected from the public. The situation thus grew critical, and the workers naturally began to think of

more militant forms of struggle. This was distasteful to Gandhi and one morning he got a brain wave and announced to the workers he would fast "in trying to keep your vows." After some three days, the mill-owners climbed down and accepted reference of the dispute to arbitration. Victory in this case, said Gandhi later, was "not quite pure as the fast I had to observe in order to sustain the labourers in their determination exercised indirect pressure upon the mill owners." It is difficult to follow his trend, for even a moral gesture, which a fast presumably is, must produce a certain pressure if it is meant to be effective. But what is important is that the experiment with a working class movement, based on just demands, showed to the capitalist how his technique could at once appeal to the masses and prevent militant actions. Gandhi's comments on this episode are revealing : "They have not won their masters' hearts, as they were not innocent in thought, word and deed. They were non-violent in deed, which is certainly to their credit." The fact of the matter was that the owners' stubbornness drove Gandhi to his fast, for otherwise the patience, so far exemplary, of the workers would surely have broken. He drew from this no lesson regarding the behaviour of classes at times of unavoidable social conflict, and spoke of the need of greater non-violence on the part only of the aggrieved workers.

Somewhat similarly, Gandhi could not keep from intervening in the struggle of the peasants of Kheda who wanted suspension of revenue payment in near-famine conditions. He recognised that the demand was just. He was even, at one stage, persuaded to advise the people to remove the crop from a field which had been wrongly attached. Substantially, the peasantry won, but Gandhi was unhappy; "the non-violence of the peasantry", he grieved, "was only superficial, like that of the mill-hands." He welcomed, however, the "great awakening among the people." Here, indeed, was a complex character, unable to be indifferent to the people's grievances, proud of their awakening and their struggle for rights, convinced of the crooked and selfish ways of the owning minority, and determined to believe, in face of contrary experience, that evils could be eliminated by rigid recourse to an abstract moral principle.[6]

Gandhi was devoting himself scrupulously so far to what

were called nation-building activities—propagating swadeshi and Hindi as the national language, for example. But in April 1918, he was asked by the Viceroy to attend the War Conference at Delhi. Leaders like Tilak and Mrs. Besant were excluded, and of course also the Ali brothers who were in detention. This put Gandhi's back up for a while, but he was won over by Lord Hardinge. He made in Hindi a one-sentence speech : "With a full sense of my responsibility I beg to support the resolution."

Being no mere speech-maker he followed this up with action, prefaced, as so many of his later moves were to be, by a long letter to the Viceroy. In this letter he affirmed his loyalty to the Empire—"with a true Home Ruler", he said, "it must be an article of faith that the Empire must be saved." He pleaded also for India's rights which, if conceded, would consolidate Indo-British co-operation. To his people he appealed : "The easiest and straightest way to win Swaraj is to participate in the defence of the empire. If the empire perishes with it perish our cherished aspirations." Strange words these, though often repeated in Gandhiana, for the future of a country as great as India was envisaged as being subsidiarily linked with the Empire !

In his own Gujarat he went to Kheda district and called for "twenty recruits from every village as sacrifice for empire and swaraj". He was not alone, for even the proud Tilak, swallowing petty humiliation from Governors and Viceroys, threw himself into recruiting work and sent Gandhi a cheque for 50,000 rupees. It is significant, however, that Tilak offered to recruit 5000 from Maharashtra if Gandhi could secure a promise from Government that Indians would get commissioned rank in the army. Gandhi replied that the help should not be in the nature of a bargain and returned Tilak's cheque !

To this chapter of Gandhi's biography, even Tendulkar gives the caption : "Recruiting Sergeant". This votary of *ahimsa* admonished Mrs. Besant : "I search *New India* in vain for an emphatic declaration from you in favour of unconditional recruiting." He wrote to Jinnah : "What I ask for is an emphatic declaration, not a halting one." He worked so hard that he broke down and nearly died. It was when he was on the point of collapse and doctors recom-

mended milk that he was faced with an excruciating moral dilemma. His good wife, Kasturba, very sensibly insisted that his vow against milk related only to cow's milk or buffalo's milk, and therefore he could, with a clear conscience, take goat's milk. It was a good job that Gandhi allowed himself to be "beguiled" by this argument—if he hadn't, he might have died. But he remained unhappy about this retreat from "principle".

He was obviously not so worried over any retreat from principle when he was busy recruiting human cannon-fodder. Some years later he explained the enigma : "No doubt it was a mixed motive that prompted me to participate in the war. Two things I can recall. Though as an individual I was opposed to war, I had no status for offering effective non-violent resistance. Non-violent resistance can only follow some real disinterested service, some heart expression of love. For instance, I would have no status to resist a savage offering animal sacrifice until he could recognise in me his friend through some loving action of mine or other means. I do not sit in judgement upon the world for its many misdeeds... The other motive was to qualify for swaraj through the good offices of the statesmen of the empire.....I am writing of my mentality in 1914 when I was a believer in the empire and its willing ability to help India in her battle for freedom. Had I been the non-violent rebel that I am to-day, I should certainly not have helped but through every effort open to non-violence I should have attempted to defeat its purpose... The fact is that the path of duty is not always easy to discern amidst claims seeming to conflict one with the other".[7]

This extended quotation is very significant. There is no doubt that Gandhi, when he said this, was somewhat apologetic. But it is good to hear him concede that his second motive was based on expediency rather than a rigid principle. Like the other politicians, he expected reward from Britain for services rendered by India—only he made no bones about it and did his part of the service with tireless sincerity. His first point is difficult to appreciate. Presumably, if he is to be taken at his word, his *modus operandi* for getting into the good books of a cannibal or a savage offering animal sacrifice would be first to help him collect a few sacrifices ! Except on that assumption, how could he go about recruiting the

way he did? All this, however, contributes to the occasionally fathomless incongruity that one sees in Gandhi and his work.

As for internal politics, Gandhi was steering a path between the moderates and the extremists. On August 25, 1918, he wrote to Tilak : "I do not intend to attend the (special) Congress session. Also I do not intend to attend the Moderates' conference. I believe that we can render a great service to India by devoting ourselves to the work of recruitment and taking lakhs of people with us. Mrs. Besant and you do not agree with my view. I also know that the Moderates will not be keen on joining this work. This is one thing. The second thing is that we should accept the principle of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme (of reforms) and clearly state whatever changes we want to propose. And we should fight to death to get those changes accepted. It is obvious that the Moderates will not accept this idea. And even if Mrs. Besant and you accept this idea, you will not fight in the manner I want to fight. Mrs. Besant has said that she is not a satyagrahi. You have accepted satyagraha as the weapon of the weak.....I have this faith that if my penance is perfect, you and Mrs. Besant will accept my principle. I can have patience.....

"I do not like in the least that the Moderates and the Extremists should try to unite forsaking their principles....."

To Surendranath Banerjee, leader of the Moderates, he wrote about the same time : ".....I hold strong and probably peculiar views not shared by many of the leaders. I implicitly believe that if we were to devote our attention exclusively to recruiting we should gain full responsible government in a year's time, if not sooner. And instead of allowing our utterly ignorant countrymen to enlist *nolens volens*, we should get an army of Home Rulers who would be willing soldiers with the knowledge that they will be soldiering for the sake of the country. I do not at the same time believe that we should declare our opinion about the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme in unequivocal terms; we should fix the minimum of our demands and seek to enforce them at all costs... I do not believe that at a critical moment like this we should be satisfied with a patched-up truce between the so-called extremists and the so-called moderates....."[8]

This was no idle correspondence. It showed Gandhi's political acumen, his emphasis on practicality and his unfailing eye on the masses. Unlike the other great Indian politicians, unlike even Tilak, who more than any other had based himself on the multitude, he seriously contemplated bringing in "lakhs of people with us" consciously demanding self-government, and recruitment was as good an opportunity for him, as any other. Except for his strenuously cultivated fixation about changing hostile hearts by satyagraha and "penance", he was a severely practical person, not unduly perturbed by the massive patriotic emotion which tears people's heartstrings and goads them to revolutionary paths, but in the limited sphere which he envisaged he was prepared for a "fight to death" and to seek to enforce minimum demand, "at all costs". He was different from the other leaders and fundamentally superior, for he had his roots among the common people, sought to live their life and improve work-a-day conditions, whether of the third-class passenger or of the indentured labourer in plantations or of the rackrented peasant or of the factory worker or of the ruined artisan. From the poor and the lowly he drew his strength and his inspiration, and he knew very well his difference from the able and often astute politicians of national stature in India. The latter wooed him, imagining him perhaps to be more or less an ingenuous, "do-gooder" type who would be useful to them. No wonder they failed.

Restored to health towards the end of 1918, Gandhi soon found himself in the vortex of stormy politics, in spite, it appears, of his predilections. His attitude towards the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms—which Mrs. Besant, no firebrand, described as "unworthy of England to give and of India to take"—was like that of the Moderates: "the scheme", he said, "deserves sympathetic handling rather than summary rejection". In February 1919, however, the notorious Rowlatt Bills were promulgated, in order, among other things, to make mere intention to publish or circulate seditious literature punishable by imprisonment. This was because the first post-war year saw our people seething for action—they wanted to fight rising prices, there was a wave of industrial strikes, as in Bombay where 125,000 textile workers were involved, and resentment at Britain's broken promises

was at fever height. Whoever else could, Gandhiji could not remain unaffected by these symptoms of grave and extensive unrest. And he turned to thoughts of satyagraha, so that the people's discontents might not run in channels which he held wrong.

Characteristically, he organised his forces independently of the Congress, and at a conference held in Sabarmati Ashram got a chosen group including Sarojini Naidu and Vallabhbhai Patel to sign a satyagraha pledge to "refuse civilly to obey these and such other laws as a committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit", faithfully following "truth" and refraining from "violence to life, person or property". A satyagraha 'sabha' started soon after in Bombay collected 1200 signatures to the pledge, and it was decided to break the law by disseminating selected seditious publications. The idea came to him, in a dream, of a general *hartal*, not just a stoppage of normal work but an act of self-purification by fasting and prayer. This *hartal* was fixed for April 6, a fateful day in Indian history, for it touched off a movement bigger far, and of a different type from what Gandhi had contemplated.

It is tempting to digress and record the brave story of those days—the universal fraternisation between Hindus and Muslims whom it was the traditional policy of Empire to divide and rule; Swami Shraddhananda, the great Arya Samaj leader, preaching on March 30 from the pulpit of India's greatest mosque, the Jumma Musjid at Delhi, and then, facing with bared chest the bayonets of Gurkhas charging demonstrators in Chandni Chowk; the police firing on unarmed processionists at Bombay, Calcutta,, Ahmedabad and other places. But one must forbear.

The response of the masses to the all-India *hartal* on April 6, 1919, startled and frightened even the initiators of the movement. Government, of course, lost its head and replied with frenzied repression. And so came the horror of brutality at Amritsar and throughout the Punjab. Amritsar, where took place the infamous Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, became a turning point in Indo-British relations nearly as important as the Revolt of 1857. An unarmed crowd, trapped in a public square, bounded on three sides by high walls, was mercilessly shot down—"to make an impression", as the

officer commanding, General Dyer, insolently said later. On Government admission, 379 were killed and 1200 left wounded and uncared for on the spot. News of it was suppressed at first; then it filtered through, incredible and stupefying, and finally, Indian excitement changed to fury and the country was roused to a bitter determination.

Invited to Delhi and the Punjab, where the people's militancy had made the leaders anxious, Gandhi was stopped en route, arrested by police and escorted back to Bombay where he was released. Reports of his arrest had inflamed the people and there were disturbances in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Gandhi gave them an admonition : "it may be necessary for me to offer satyagraha against ourselves." Returning to Ahmedabad he announced a three-day fast, and discovering that disturbances had taken place in small towns like Nadiad also, he cried out that the entire satyagraha campaign had been "a Himalayan miscalculation" and called off the movement on April 18.

Tendulkar records that Gandhi was more shocked by the people's violent spirit than by Government's atrocities. "I am sorry", said the leader, whose people, roused as never before, almost worshipped the ground which he trod, "I underrated the forces of evil.....I would be untrue to satyagraha if I allowed by any action of mine to be used as an occasion for feeding violence, for embittering relations between the English and the Indians. Our satyagraha must, therefore, now consist in ceaselessly helping the authorities in all the ways available to us to restore order and to curb lawlessness....." As he said these words, the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, published a resolution declaring in the plainest terms his intention to suppress with all force the national movement. On April 20, the All-India Congress Committee demanded an inquiry into the Punjab events. Gandhi, pressed from all sides to proceed to the Punjab regardless of consequences, decided, however, not to do so when permission was refused him by the Viceroy. He could only go there in mid-October, and though three months earlier he had announced suspension of civil resistance he was received in the Punjab with unprecedented enthusiasm. Such, indeed, was the hold he had come to command for his reputation of a saint and his readiness, as the government publication, "India

in 1919", put it, "to take up the cudgels on behalf of any individual or class whom he regards as being oppressed."

Gandhi had a large share in drawing up the Congress's inquiry report on the Punjab atrocities, but moved as he doubtless was, it was not till 1920 that he made up his mind about a show-down with Government. On November 24, 1919, he presided over an All-India Khilafat Conference at Delhi, called to give voice to Muslim resentment at Britain having the lion's share of the spoils out of Turkey's truncated empire and encroaching on the powers of the *Khalifa*. Muslim militancy, represented by men like Maulana Hasrat Mohani, demanded boycott of British goods, but Gandhi discouraged it. He had sensed, however, the ominous rumblings of the day, and thought of "non-co-operation"—a word which was to make history but whose implications were still unclear to him—as a weapon to be used in case of Government's betrayal of Muslim hopes.

The Congress session of 1919 was held at Amritsar, and it saw Gandhi's real entry to it. In spite of the April happenings, for which the president, Motilal Nehru, said they had met in deep mourning, the tone of the proceedings was tame. The first resolution thanked the King-Emperor for his proclamation and welcomed announcement of the Prince of Wales's proposed visit, which was later to be spectacularly boycotted. Tilak and C. R. Das, the two tallest leaders, wanted to obstruct and reject the "Reforms", while Gandhi and Malaviya proposed working them, with the result that a compromise resolution was adopted, which purported to advise working of the "Reforms" with a view to early establishment of full responsible government. Gandhi had even secured passage of a resolution blaming not only Government but also the people of the Punjab and Gujarat. And he said he trusted Britain's good intentions still. "To trust is a virtue; it is weakness that begets distrust". His advice to the country, at a time when it was seething, was "to settle down quietly to work", and in his celebrated journal "Young India" which was first published on October 8, 1919, he had begun writing on "constructive satyagraha as also sometimes cleansing satyagraha".

The tide of mass unrest was soon to be in flood, however, and it was accentuated by the economic crisis which

began to develop in 1920. The first six months of that year saw no fewer than 200 strikes involving one and a half millions of workers. "Settling down quietly" seemed a difficult proposition, and even the Mahatma's adjuration could not make any sense of it to the people.

Different sections gave different reasons for their sentiment, but all shared the general unrest. Most Muslims, of whatever class, were alienated from Britain because of their attachment, however unrealistic it proved to be, to the principle of the *khalifa's* temporal powers. At the end of 1919, Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali came out of jail and with dynamic energy plunged at once into agitation and propaganda. They were already leading figures in Indian politics; in 1917, Government had offered to release them if they signed an undertaking that they would do nothing helpful to the King-Emperor's enemies, but had not released them when they were ready to sign it with the qualification : "without prejudice to our allegiance to Islam." The Khilafat Committee, under Muhammad Ali's leadership, became a powerful, representative and decidedly aggressive body. Muslim theologians lent their weight to the anti-British movement, and there was great excitement when in January 1920, the Khilafat manifesto was issued. Soon afterwards, Muhammad Ali went to England with a deputation to impress on Britain the danger of estranging Muslims by indifference and even hostility to Muslim interests and ideals.

Thanks mainly to Gandhi, who shrewdly assessed the objective value to the national movement of this keenly felt Muslim grievance, the Khilafat movement did not function in an exclusively Muslim context. More and more, he came to be regarded as the leader of Hindus and Muslims alike. In his own words, he saw in the situation "an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Muslims as would not arise in a hundred years", and early in 1920, he issued a manifesto asserting the justice of Muslim claims and asking Hindus to realise that the Khilafat question overshadowed the "Reforms" and everything else. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, then in his early thirties but already famous and highly regarded for his learning, his eloquence and his courage, was in January 1920 released from internment and plunged at once into the movement. Four months before the Congress did so, the All India Khilafat

Committee, in May 1920, adopted Gandhi's non-co-operation programme, in the formulation of which Maulana Azad was perhaps no less responsible. In June, a conference of Muslim and Hindu leaders met at Allahabad, and jointly approved the programme. In August, the Treaty of Sèvres completed the humiliation which Versailles foreshadowed for the Khalifa. Next month, a historic special session of the Congress met at Calcutta, when a resolution was carried, not without influential opposition, proclaiming the policy of "progressive non-violent non-co-operation, inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi, until the said wrongs (Khilafat and the Punjab) are righted, and Swaraj established." Nationalism and Khilafatism were "now organically related, as the avowed twin objects of the entire country." In October 1920, Muhammad Ali returned from England to report the failure of his mission and urged Muslims to join hands with Hindus in freeing India, for without that no Khilafat freedom was possible.

A magnificent period of struggle followed, when Gandhi was the pre-eminent leader. Tilak who alone might conceivably have taken a seat ahead of him, had died on August 1, 1920 ; besides, his heart was not wholly in the non-co-operation and Khilafat agitation, and only being an empiricist in politics he had told Gandhi : "I wish you every success, and if you gain the popular ear you will find in me an enthusiastic supporter."

Gandhi's ear was so affixed to India's soil that he knew the time had come for him to act or lose his grip over the people. Perhaps this explains a certain casuistic relaxation of his principle of non-violence. "The Khilafat has now become", he said on March 10, "the question of questions". He knew well that Muslim divines and their followers did not share his faith in non-violence, but when the masses were so deeply astir, he was ready not to be finicky. So, on March 19, he said : ".....Muslims have special Koranic obligations in which Hindus may or may not join. They, therefore, reserve to themselves the right, in the event of the failure of non-co-operation-cum-non-violence, in order to enforce justice, to resort to all such methods as may be enjoined by the Islamic scriptures....."[9] This was something of a gamble, but Gandhi made it. Neither the inadequacy of the "Reforms", nor the

Punjab horrors had impelled Gandhi to action, but the Khilafat "wrong" superadded to the people's multitudinous discontents changed the situation qualitatively, and Gandhi had to be in the thick of it. A tide had come in India's affairs, which Gandhi knew best of all how to take at the flood.

Notes To Chapter IV

[1] D. G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. I pp. 88-89, 195.

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 219 ff; Homer A. Jack, *op. cit.* pp. 128 ff.

[3] Tendulkar, *Ibid.* pp. 226-29; also pp. 236-42, for a remarkable speech entitled "Real Economics".

[4] Ibid. p. 196; M. K. Gandhi, "Satyagraha in South Africa", pp. xi-xii.

[5] Rajendra Prasad, "Satyagraha in Champaran" (ed. 1949), *passim*; Tendulkar, *Ibid*, pp. 243-61.

[6] Ibid. pp. 269-74; Gandhi, Ibid. p. xiii.

[7] Tendulkar, *Ibid.* pp. 275-85.

[8] *Ibid.* pp. 283-84.

[9] *Ibid.* p. 346.

CHAPTER V

Glory And Despair

Great days followed Gandhi's full-throated and whole-hearted espousal of the Khilafat cause. The Muslim resurgence had begun in 1919, and as the only leader on the scene to whom nothing that touched the people's hearts could be alien, Gandhi became its guide, philosopher and friend. When on June 22, 1920, the Muslims sent a message to the Viceroy from their Khilafat committee that they would start non-co-operation if Turkish grievances were not redressed before the 1st of August, Gandhi also wrote the same day, explaining to the Viceroy the justice of the Khilafat cause and the reasons why he had taken it up. The further ultimatum to the Viceroy on the 1st of July was sent by Gandhi himself on behalf of Muslims and Hindus, and when on August 31, 1920, the programme of non-co-operation was launched symbolically by the Khilafatists—even before the special session of Congress at Calcutta—Gandhi gave concrete expression to it by returning his Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal for services rendered to the Empire. He had been preceded by Hakim Ajmal Khan, one of the movement's great leaders, who had returned his decorations, but the gesture was important, and it was accompanied, as usual, by a notable letter to Government.

There were certain misgivings, naturally enough, about the juxtaposition of political demands and religious issues. It was pointed out that there was perhaps a dichotomy of interest between those to whom the plight of the Khilafat was the central fact and those to whom Swaraj was the paramount object in view. To many the anti-British movement among Muslims was welcome but the purely theological weight behind it rather suspect. It was not only that the Khilafat question alone was approached in religious terms; the demand for national independence too was voiced with an Islamic appeal. "The tenets of Islam", said Abul Kalam Azad on his second arrest, "are preserved in its scriptures. These, under no

circumstances, make it possible for Muslims to enjoy life at the expense of liberty." He was too good a nationalist, however, not to add : "Today the Muslims have come to the firm decision that in freeing their country from its slavery they will take their fullest share along with their Hindu, Sikh, Parsi and Christian brethren. Continuously in the last twelve years I have been training my community and my country in demanding their rights and their liberty."[1] It was feared, however, and not without reason, that a predominantly religious approach might give rise to such problems of conscience as the primacy of the country's interests or of religion, problems which in normal times do not obtrude but might very well create trouble in the course of a national, and necessarily secular, struggle. "Muslim first, and Indian afterwards", or *vice versa*, came sometimes to be posed ; perhaps basically no dilemma, it still rankled and in periods of political depression created bad blood. The real answer to the dilemma was a developing movement of the working masses—in rural areas, for instance, many Muslims even thought the word 'Khilafat' came from the Urdu *Khilaf*, meaning, 'against' the government. For that kind of movement, Gandhi had much distaste.

With a native realism, however, Gandhi felt that championing the khilafat would cement Hindu-Muslim unity as nothing else could. He had, besides, no special fear of religion overflowing into politics ; his aim, indeed, was to spiritualise politics. In 1919-20 he noticed also that many Indian Muslims who had drifted into secularism were being drawn back by the exhilaration of the time into a religious loyalty, and Islamic emotions, somewhat dormant, had once more revived. Muhammad Ali, for example, read the Quran in a language that he understood for the first time in his life and "discovered Islam". The failure of his Khilafat mission to London turned his mind decidedly towards the national question. Eighteen thousand Muslims who had left the country in 1920 as *Muhajarins* performing the Islamic duty of leaving an unfree land, suffered greatly, and except for the many who died and the few who escaped to Soviet territory, they returned home convinced that India's fight for freedom was to be fought, inescapably, on India's soil.[2]

No doubt the Congress report on the Punjab atrocities, published on March 25, 1920, had moved Gandhi very deeply,

and this is reflected in some of his then speeches. He had been largely responsible for the draft, and it must have been vivid in his mind when on March 19 he spoke at a Khilafat meeting. ".....The resolution", he said, "undoubtedly foreshadows, in the most honourable and unmistakable manner, the stages through which this great movement will pass, the last stage being a bloody revolution. God forbid that this country should have to pass through such a revolution and all its horrors but the feeling on this Khilafat question runs so high and goes so deep that an unjust solution may, if peaceful means fail, land this country in a revolutionary movement, the like of which we have not seen before.....I venture to hope that the Government will not anticipate revolution by thoughtless and angry repression....." The Khilafat and Punjab "wrongs" cried for redress, and Gandhi saw also the opportunities unloosed by the uninspiring end of World War I, the rising strike wave, the universal discontent. It was, as said Lajpat Rai, president of the special Calcutta session of Congress, "a revolutionary period", whose contagion India could not escape. Lajpat Rai also said, very truly, that Indian leaders were "by instinct and tradition averse to revolutions"—Gandhi, above all, was certainly so. Thus there appeared the contradiction of a surging mass movement in a "revolutionary period" led by men "averse to revolutions". In spite of it, however, the native hue of the people's resolution was not too sicklied o'er with the pale cast of the leadership.

In nothing was the strength of that resolution better displayed than in the apparent consolidation of Hindu-Muslim unity. Gokhale had once said that in India's communal triangle, Hindu, Muslim and British, two sides were always greater than the third. Even in unity's heyday, however, there were some disquieting symptoms. This can be seen in a remarkable article in Gandhi's great weekly "Young India" under date September 8, 1920. There he wrote :

"During the Madras tour at Bezwada I had occasion to remark about the national crisis and suggested that it would be better to have cries about ideals than about men. I asked the audience to replace 'Mahatma Gandhi-ki-Jai' and 'Muhammad Ali-Shaukat Ali-ki-Jai', by 'Hindu-Musalman-ki-Jai'. Brother Shaukat Ali, who followed, positively laid down the law. In spite of the Hindu-Muslim unity, he had observed

that, if Hindus shouted 'Bande Mataram', the Muslims rang out with 'Allah-ho-Akbar' and vice versa. This, he rightly said, jarred on the ear and still showed that the people did not act with one mind. There should be, therefore, only three cries recognised. 'Allah-ho-Akbar' to be joyously sung out by Hindus and Muslims, showing God alone was great, and no other. The second should be 'Bande Mataram' (Hail, Motherland) or 'Bharat-Mata-ki-Jai (Victory to Mother India). The third should be 'Hindu-Musalman-ki-Jai', without which there was no victory for India, and no true demonstration of the greatness of God. I do wish that newspapers and public men would take up the Maulana's suggestion and lead the people only to use the three cries. They are full of meaning. The first is a prayer and confession of our littleness and therefore a sign of humility. It is a cry in which all Hindus and Muslims join in reverence and prayerfulness. Hindus may not fight shy of Arabic words, when their meaning is not only totally inoffensive but even ennobling. God is no respector of any particular tongue. 'Bande Mataram', apart from its wonderful associations, expresses the one national wish, the rise of India to her full height. And I should prefer 'Bande Mataram' to 'Bharat-Mata-ki-Jai', as it would be a graceful recognition of the intellectual and emotional superiority of Bengal. Since India can be nothing without the union of the Hindu and the Muslim heart, 'Hindu-Musalman-ki-Jai' is a cry which we may never forget".[3]

There came a day, unhappily, when Muslims resented 'Bande Mataram' and made a major grievance of the use of this hallowed slogan. Even in the great days of Hindu-Muslim fraternisation, there was the allergy of Hindus to 'Allah-ho-Akbar' and of Muslims to 'Bande Mataram'. These were little things perhaps, brushed aside as irrelevant in the excitement of those days, but they indicated an incipient distemper. The cure for it was the conscious and organised participation of the people of all communities in militant mass movements revolving round the condition of the people irrespective of religion. To that, however, Gandhi and his principal colleagues were themselves allergic.

The special session of the Congress at Calcutta (September 4-9, 1920) put the seal of authority in Gandhi's hands. He moved a resolution affirming that for the redress of the Khilafat

and Punjab 'wrongs' and for the establishment of Swaraj, the Congress must take over the non-co-operation formula evolved by the Khilafat committee "and inasmuch as", the resolution noted, *"a beginning should be made by the classes who have hitherto moulded and represented public opinion;* and inasmuch as Government consolidates its powers through titles and honours bestowed on the people, through schools controlled by it, through its law courts and its legislative councils, and inasmuch as it is desirable, in the present state of the movement, to take the minimum risk and to call for the least sacrifice compatible with the attainment of the desired object, this Congres earnestly advises :

"(a) Surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation of nominated posts in local bodies ;

"(b) Refusal to attend Government levees, *durbars* and other official and semi official functions held by government officials, or in their honour ;

"(c) Gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges in the various provinces ;

"(d) Gradual boycott of British courts by lawyers and litigants, and establishment of private arbitration courts by them for the settlement of private disputes ;

"(e) Refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves *as recruits for service in Mesopotamia ;*

"(f) Withdrawal of the candidates from election to the reformed councils and refusal on the part of the voters to vote for any candidate who may, despite the Congress advice, offer himself for election ;

"(g) Boycott of foreign goods."[4] (Italics ours).

An amendment sought to defer the movement by proposing a last-effort deputation to the Prime Minister and a demand for immediate self-government, but was defeated by 1852 against 883 votes. Lajpat Rai, winding up the session, expressed certain misgivings about the resolution, but the atmosphere in the country was electric. All could feel that the people's ire had been roused and there could be no easy assuagement of it. Action was to ensue—action under the people's unique new apostle who had not hesitated to describe the British Government in India as "satanic". That it was,

the leader insisted, to be undeviatingly "non-violent" action, did not worry the masses who were aching for a fight.

Three months later, the annual session of the Congress met at Nagpur, and with virtual unanimity adopted enthusiastically the new programme placed before the country. The creed of the Congress was changed; it was no longer "colonial self-government within the Empire" to be achieved by constitutional means, but "the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means". The organisation of the Congress shed its former loose character and took on the habiliments of a modern party, with its units reaching down to every locality and a Working Committee of fifteen members to function as the year's standing executive. The Congress said goodbye to its old-time respectability; one hardly heard the old spate of English oratory; one never saw Congressmen dressed in any but honest home-spun. It was at Nagpur Congress that Gandhi declared: "the British will have to beware that if they do not want to do justice, it will be the bounden duty of every Indian to destroy the Empire." He still had expectation of justice from Britain, but the temper of Nagpur was voiced more faithfully by Maulana Muhammad Ali who said, amid applause, that the Empire was "already dead and buried". Gandhi also could not help saying that while India did not "want to end the British connection at all costs, unconditionally", it was derogatory to national dignity to think of the permanance of the British connection at any cost, and it was "impossible to accept its continuance in the presence of the grievous wrongs done by the British Government and its refusal to acknowledge or redress them."[5]

If, however, the Calcutta Congress resolution is scanned, it gives significant glimpses of Gandhi's mind. "The classes which have hitherto moulded and represented public opinion" —the classes, that is to say, rather than the masses—were to take the initiative in the non-co-operation campaign. It is clear also that while the programme announced was calculated to harass the British Government, there was nothing in it to shake the essential foundations of imperialist rule. Such forms of militant mass action as the industrial workers' general strike or the struggle of peasants for land and against the burden of rent and debt—forms of struggle that would at once have embarrassed Indian vested interests as well as their foreign

protectors—were not at all envisaged, and when they inevitably happened later, were frowned upon by Gandhi. It is more than notable that "refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves as recruits" was confined only to "service in Mesopotamia". It would seem that only on a bigger scale than heretofore, Gandhi wanted to put pressure on Government and compel it to come to terms, rather than to make sure that the empire was "dead and buried".

That the people wanted to go much further than Gandhi is plain. The furthest, however, that the leader was ready to go was the non-payment of taxes to the government. That was to be the extreme limit of his programme—he made this concession at the Nagpur Congress—and whether it should be resorted to was left for decision by the Congress at its plenary session or by the All India Congress Committee. The demands of the poorer peasants and of the landless agrarian workers for cancellation of usurious debts, lowering of landlords' rents and distribution of land among the peasants, were kept in cold storage.

This perhaps explains why Jawaharlal Nehru found that Gandhi was on the subject of Swaraj "delightfully vague..... and did not encourage clear thinking on the subject either", but of course, "we all felt he was a great and unique man and a glorious leader, and having put our faith in him we gave him an almost blank cheque, for the time being at least." Subhas Chandra Bose, then a young enthusiast who had thrown up his appointment in the much-coveted Indian Civil Service, records that he failed to gather, in his talks with Gandhi, "a clear conception of the tactics whereby the hands of the Government could be forced." The people had plunged into the making of history, their spirit warmed by the certitude that Swaraj was no longer an elusive objective—had not the Mahatma promised its achievement within the year ? Few felt any qualms in that atmosphere of mass elation—even Bengal "terrorists", who had no faith in "non-violence" as a creed put Gandhi's programme on probation, as it were, and promised co-operation in achieving it. Gandhi was positive about the date of victory—December 31, 1921, was the last of several datelines fixed ; but he was unclear about his plan of campaign. Maybe, the lack of clarity was inescapable ; without

a smoke-screen of mass exultation, sufficient pressure could not be put on Government, and pressure for a compromise settlement rather than a fight to the finish was what Gandhi really aimed at. He spoke, indeed, of "civil revolution which, whenever practised, would mean the end of Government's authority and open defiance of Government and its law", but this idea, which lured the people, was never really defined, never elaborated. And for all the heroisms and ecstasies of 1921, hope often deferred made the heart of India sick.[6]

Nineteen hundred and twentyone saw in any case a great sweep forward of the movement of our masses, without precedent in our history. A sleeping giant, now awakened, wanted to shake his invincible locks in a manner which did not often fit into the pattern laid down by Gandhi. In "Young India" dated February 16, 1921, he wrote : "Strikes are the order of the day. They are a symptom of the existing unrest..... [Labour leaders] consider that strikes may be engineered for political purposes. In my opinion it will be a most serious mistake to make use of labour strikes for such a purpose." His attitude was the same as in South Africa where he refused to make common cause with European strikers, not realising perhaps that thereby he lost a great opportunity of fighting the colour bar at the same time. He was positive about the undesirability of strikes, the employment, that is to say by the working class of its own weapon of struggle in the freedom movement. Whether consciously or sub-consciously, which it is immaterial and useless to try to determine, he must have felt that once the working class enters the field of political action unhampered, the movement will go beyond the limits he had set, the limits that the Indian bourgeoisie, mildly against Government but apprehensive of the lengths that the common people when roused would go, wanted to impose. Gandhi was perhaps no conscious tool in the bourgeoisie's hands, but for all his predilection for "civil revolution", whatever that might precisely mean, his objective and that of the Indian bourgeoisie basically coincided.

In 1921, there were, according to official figures, some 400 strikes affecting half a million workers. There was in May a strike of at least 12000 indentured labourers in the Assam tea gardens ; planters, most of them British, had in spite of profits piling up, suddenly dismissed numerous workers and the strike

commenced. Government refused relief to these "coolies" who were thrown out of their beggarly shacks in the tea estates and trekked down to the steamer station at Chandpur, only to find themselves stranded. Even women workers were beaten up and "coolies" trying to board steamers thrown into the water. Stung by bureaucracy's behaviour and in response to the call of patriotism resounding in the country, the entire Indian staff of the Assam Bengal Railway, and a little later all steamship workers, resorted to a strike. Congressmen could not help espousing the workers' cause and in the end the people succeeded in repatriating the stranded tea-garden labourers to their homes. Gandhi, however, was by no means happy with all these happenings.

His approach, indeed, was very different from that of those who wore shoes that pinched. In April 1921, the peasants of Mulsi threatened satyagraha for redress of grievances; Gandhi requested Tatas, who owned the land, to take necessary steps. He supported the movement of Chirala Perala villagers in Andhra who refused to have a municipality, for that would mean the obligation of tax payment. He rebuked the non-co-operators of Malegaon for having deviated, in May 1921, from the rigid ways of non-violence. For all that, vibrant demonstrations took place. In Rai Bareilly (U.P.), the arrest of *Kisan* leaders caused a great peasant demonstration on January 6, when the police opened fire, killing seven and injuring many more. Next month, 70,000 kisans of that province made a spectacular entry into the ranks of non-co-operators. About the same time, Sikh peasants joined the movement, and the massacre at Nankana Sahib steeled their resolve. For some years they had been attracted to a puritan movement which, even Sir Valentine Chirol admits, had "unquestionably a nationalist side", and had addressed itself to the recovery of shrines which had passed into the hands of corrupt *Mohunts*, faithless both to their religious and temporal trust but upheld by the administration. A great popular demonstration was organised for March 5, but the Mohunt, taking the offensive, butchered over a hundred worshippers inside the temple, their corpses soaked in petrol and burnt so that only a number of charred skulls remained as evidence of the crime. All India was horrified, but luckily the Akalis decided to follow a policy of

non-violent resistance, or the Punjab would have been in flames. Elsewhere in India, as in Bengal and Andhra, the peasantry in Midnapore and other districts started 'no-tax' campaigns. And in August there occurred the famous revolt of the Moplahs in Malabar, which needs a little attention.

The Moplahs were "unusually poor peasants along the Malabar coast of South India, numbering about a million in all, distinguished from their neighbours by their low economic level and by being Muslims." Often in the past, they had risen against their oppressors, blending bravery and ferocity in pathetic protest against their exploitation and misery. The first notable Moplah outbreak in modern times took place in 1873, and was repeated in 1885, 1894 and 1896; the British, not wishing to let the grass grow under their feet, permanently stationed troops there and a special police force. In 1921, the Moplahs heard the evangel of non-co-operation. "Presently the peasants were thoroughly aroused, and in a fervour of apocalyptic vision they gathered themselves together and undertook to set up a khilafat kingdom of their own, in which they should at last be free. They attacked the police and the military who were there to keep them oppressed, they attacked their landlords and moneylenders; they attacked everyone in sight. For a short time they were in fiery possession of a considerable area. The Moplahs were bitter; bitterly anti-Hindu, bitterly anti-British, bitter against the world which gave them only misery. Their ardour was the ardour of an oppressed class rising against its enemies, the ardour of religious fanaticism destroying sin and establishing a kingdom of good".[7]

One might have thought of Gandhi going in for sack cloth and ashes, but he was human enough to react as a good Indian would, particularly when Government, busy crushing the revolt, refused him and the Ali brothers permission to go to Malabar, and its scribes such as Sir Valentine Chirol gloated over the "extremely backward and unruly" Moplahs having taught the Hindus a lesson. "The murder of Europeans, the burning and looting of Government buildings, the tearing up of railways and telegraphs, recalled," Chirol wrote, "the worst excesses committed by Indian mobs two years ago in the Punjab. But on this occasion", he jubilated, "there has been no Mohammedan-Hindu fraternisation;"[8] No doubt, the

Hindus suffered horribly, and to some of them the Moplah rebellion signified a turning of the ways. Sir C. Sankaran Nair wrote a vitriolic little book, "Gandhi and Anarchy", and when Gandhi referred to the rebels as "brave, God-fearing Moplahs", he came in for much obloquy. He and the Congress leadership, however, did not lose their head; the Working Committee, condemning Moplah violence, recorded without hesitation that "provocation beyond endurance was given to the Moplahs and that the reports published by and on behalf of the Government have given a one-sided and highly exaggerated account of the wrongs done by the Moplahs and an understatement of the needless destruction of life resorted to by the Government in the name of peace and order."

Meanwhile the non-co-operation wave surged more and more powerfully as the months rolled on. At Karachi, on July 8, the All-India Khilafat Committee, after reiterating the Muslim claims, declared that no Muslim should serve in the British army or assist in recruiting. The conference went so far as to assert that "if no settlement is arrived at before Christmas regarding our campaign, the Indian Republic will be declared at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress." On account of this resolution, Muhammad Ali, accompanying Gandhi to Malabar, was arrested at Waltair, and Gandhi, stopped from proceeding to his destination, declared : "the Governor of Bombay (who had ordered the arrest) evidently does not know that the Indian National Congress began to tamper with the loyalty of the sepoy in September last year, that the Central Khilafat Committee began it earlier, and I began it earlier still, for I must be permitted to take the credit or the odium of suggesting that India had a right openly to tell the sepoy and everyone who served the Government in any capacity whatsoever that he participated in the wrong done by the Government. The conference at Karachi merely repeated Congress declarations in terms of Islam." Later, on September 19, he said at Trichinopoly : "I am sorry I was not present at that historic conference at Karachi, and had I been present there, I should also have been one of those who supported that resolution."[9]

Gandhi's mind must have developed an unusual militancy during these months, and it was because of the temper of the people which he almost instinctively gauged. On July 31,

1921, he presided in Bombay over a tremendous bonfire of foreign cloth, and his good friend, C. F. Andrews, wrote to him in agonised protest : ".....I almost fear now to wear the khaddar that you have given me lest I should appear to be judging other people as a Pharisee would, saying 'I am holier than thou'. I never felt like this before." Gandhi soothed his friend in words that are important : "India is racial today. It is with the utmost effort that I find it possible to keep under check the evil passions of the people. The general body of the people are filled with ill-will because they are weak and hopelessly ignorant of the way to shed their weakness. I am transferring the ill-will from men to things....."[10] The "passions" of the people must have run very high for the Mahatma to express himself so.

Immediately on the arrest in September of the Ali brothers and several other Muslim notables on the charge of seditious speeches at Karachi, to be sentenced later to two years' imprisonment. The Central Khilafat Committee met at Delhi and ratified the resolutions of the Karachi conference. On October 4, Gandhi announced that he considered himself, as ever, bound irrevocably in comradeship with his Muslim colleagues. Fifty leading Congressmen associated themselves with the announcement. At a September conference he had gone so far as to declare that "he was so sure of getting Swaraj before the end of the year that he could not conceive of himself as living beyond December 31 without having won Swaraj." It was on September 21 again, that he took to the loincloth, a grand gesture of identification with his people.

About this time there took place a historic controversy between Gandhi and Tagore. Writing in the Calcutta monthly, "Modern Review" (October 1921), the poet spoke of Gandhi in beautiful terms of homage but lashed out against the country-wide craze of blind obedience to the leader. Some months earlier, Bepin Chandra Pal, Tilak's former colleague and an early supporter of non-co-operation, had left Gandhi's camp, because, he said, he believed not in "magic" but logic. The poet now castigated the fanaticism of the crowd and asked if India should go on reciting with Gandhi a chapter of negation, dwell eternally on the faults of others, and strive for Swaraj on the basis of hatred. He called the Mahatma "our master", and adjured : "Consider the burning of cloth, heaped

up before the very eyes of our motherland shivering and ashamed in her nakedness.....Is it not another instance of the magical formula ?.....Economics is bundled out and a fictitious moral dictum dragged into its place.....We must refuse to accept as our ally the illusion-haunted magic-ridden slave-mentality that is at the root of all the poverty and insult under which our country groans.....The time, moreover, has arrived when we must think of one thing more, and that is this. The awakening of India is a part of the awakening of the world. Convulsion is neither local nor temporary....."

Gandhi's reply was a classic. Romain Rolland called Tagore's manifesto "a poem of sunlight", and Gandhi's answer in "Young India" (October 13, 1921), under the caption "The Great Sentinel", made him think of "a *Bodhisattva* of pity who had given up poetic flights in order to live among the disinherited." Gandhi wrote with unwonted passion:

".....When there is war, the poet lays down the lyre, the lawyer his law reports, the schoolboy his books. The poet will sing the true note after the war is over.....When a house is on fire, all the inmates go out and each one takes up a bucket to quench the fire. When all about me are dying for want of food, the only occupation permissible for me is to feed the hungry. It is my conviction that India is a house on fire because its manhood is being daily scorched, it is dying of hunger because it has no work to buy food with.....

.....In burning my foreign clothes I burn my shame...

.....True to his poetical instinct the poet lives for the morrow and would have us do likewise. He presents to our admiring gaze the beautiful picture of the birds early in the morning singing hymns of praise as they soar into the sky. These birds had their day's food and soared with rested wings in whose veins new blood had flown during the previous night. But I have had the pain of watching birds who for want of strength could not be coaxed even into a flutter of their wings. The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigilance or an eternal trance. It is an indescribably painful state which has to be experienced to be realised. I have found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir. The hungry millions ask for one poem—invigorating food. They cannot be given it. They must earn

it. And they can only earn it by the sweat of their brow....." Here was, wrote Rolland, "the misery of the world rising before the dream of art and crying 'Dare deny me existence?' ". It did not let Gandhi rest; it made him advise the poet in all solemnity: "Let Tagore spin, like the others, let him burn his foreign clothes. That is the duty today. God will take care of the morrow. As it says in the *Gita*, 'Do right!' "[11]

The struggle soared to new heights as the end of the year approached. There was expectation, after a November meeting of the All India Congress Committee, that civil disobedience, starting with non-payment of taxes, would be organised at least in several provinces. There was a boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales, and like that of the old Duke of Connaught who came earlier in the year and rode in gorgeous panoply along deserted streets, the Prince's peregrination was also a fiasco. Congress volunteers were declared an unlawful organisation and hundreds of them began to be arrested. Before the end of December, most of the top leaders, Gandhi excepted, were put behind bars. The number of political prisoners, when 1922 began, was at least thirty thousand.

The bureaucracy knew that repression could not daunt our people and took furtive steps towards a possible rapprochement. The Viceroy authorised Pandit Malaviya in December to convey an offer that if the boycott of the Prince's visit was called off, the political prisoners would be let out and a round table conference convoked. Gandhi, against the advice of men like C. R. Das and Maulana Azad who were then in jail, refused to call off the movement till the conference had met and produced results. The government, however, was not prepared to accept such terms though, of course, it had lost its nerve to some extent.

It was in this context that the annual session of the Congress was held in Ahmedabad, with Hakim Ajmal Khan deputising in the chair for C. R. Das who was in jail. There apparently was no lack of enthusiasm, though Swaraj was far away when on December 31 the midnight chimes rang in the new year, 1922. Resolutions were passed, proclaiming "the fixed determination of the Congress to continue the campaign of non-violent non-operation with greater vigour.....till Swaraj is established", calling upon all Indians over eighteen to join the illegal National Volunteers, pledging "Civil Disobedience,

whether mass or individual, whether of an offensive or defensive character" and appointing Gandhi virtual dictator "as the sole executive authority of the Congress."

The country could not apparently be kept much longer in leash. The people were awaiting, fretfully, the leader's orders to march ahead. Misgivings, however, had begun to coagulate in Gandhi's mind. The non-violence of his idylls he found to be beyond his people's ken. Among his Muslim colleagues, especially, he noticed a tendency to demand abandonment of the "non-violence" clause. As early as July, he had cajoled out of the Ali brothers a disavowal of any intention to incite to violence in certain of their speeches. On November 17, the Bombay disturbances drove him to an expiatory fast and to state that the people's temper had made Swaraj "stink in his nostrils." His unbending doctrinal loyalty seemed to blind him to the realities of an explosive situation and he demanded of his people an impossible restraint.

At Ahmedabad, therefore, Gandhi began putting on the brakes. People who expected from Ahmedabad the summons to civil disobedience were asked to hold their souls in patience. References to civil disobedience were hedged round with provisos. And when Maulana Hasrat Mohani moved a resolution defining Swaraj as "complete independence, free from all foreign control", Gandhi opposed it with every sign of vehemence. "Let us understand our limitations", he told the Congress. "Let Hindus and Musalmans have absolute, indissoluble unity. Who is here who can say today with confidence : 'yes, Hindu-Muslim unity has become an indissoluble factor of Indian nationalism' ?.....Let us first of all gather up our strength ; let us first of all sound our own depths. Let us not go into waters whose depths we do not know.....Are creeds such simple things like clothes which a man can change at will ? For creeds people die, and for creeds people live from age to age. Are you going to change the creed which, with all deliberation, and after great debate in Nagpur, you accepted ?....." To Gandhi, Hasrat Mohani's resolution showed "lack of responsibility" and had "grieved" him. No wonder the radical move was defeated. The Government of India communicated its relief to the Secretary of State at the defeat of Hasrat Mohani's amendment and the omission of non-payment of taxes from the civil disobedience resolution.[12]

A month went by, a month of gnawing expectancy, but Gandhi gave no directives. Many districts approached him, pleading for permission to begin a no-tax campaign; one district in Andhra—Guntur—even launched it on its own, but its contumacy was rebuked and Gandhi directed that all taxes were to be paid up by the due date. The Government had been in a quandary, for in January they were hard put to it to collect four of the fifteen lakhs that were due. To the people, therefore, Gandhi's order came as a shock. The iron, from all accounts, was hot, but the leader did not think it right to strike.

At last, on February 1, 1922, Gandhi notified the Viceroy that if the political prisoners were not released and repressive measures not abandoned, he would begin "mass civil disobedience". He had chosen for this purpose one tiny district in his native Gujarat, the district of Bardoli, with a population of 87,000. It was, he thought, a model area, wedded to non-violence, eminently suited for the experiment.

Hardly had the letter to the Viceroy been despatched when news came that at Chauri Chaura, a little village in the United Provinces, police constables had opened fire on a crowd of angry peasants, and as they retired to the *thana* when their ammunition was exhausted, the crowd stormed and burnt the police station, with the result that 22 policemen were killed. To the country's dismay, it was the signal to Gandhi's overwrought soul, for sounding the retreat. He listened, characteristically, to "the still, small voice" within; he called Chauri Chaura "the bitterest humiliation"; it was the cruellest of all his "Himalayan miscalculations"; and also he decided to humble himself "before God and man" and call off his campaign. Hastily, the Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli on February 12, and all India, insensible of the refinements of non-violent philosophy, literally "reeled" to hear that civil disobedience had been suspended, and a "constructive programme" of spinning, anti-untouchability, temperance and educational work offered in its stead. "I know", wrote Gandhi, "that the drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but there is no doubt that it is religiously sound." It was, to most Indians, a staggering statement and the country was plunged into the deepest gloom.

"To sound the order of retreat", wrote Subhas Chandra Bose later, "when public enthusiasm was reaching boiling point was nothing short of a national calamity. The principal lieutenants of the Mahatma, Deshbandhu Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, who were all in prison, shared the popular resentment. I was with the Deshbandhu at the time and I could see that he was beside himself with anger and sorrow." Letters were sent to Gandhi by Motilal Nehru and Lajpat Rai, but with no result. Much opposition was voiced at the Delhi meeting of the All India Congress Committee where the Bardoli decisions came up on February 24 for ratification. Gandhi had his way, but he felt the majority that backed him did not have his kind of faith in non-violence. "Is it not a futile experiment I am conducting?", he asked in sorrow, but he made up his mind to stand four-square to all the winds of criticism : "the patriotic spirit demands loyal and strict adherence to non-violence and truth. Those who do not believe in them should retire from the Congress organisation."

The entire movement now got stuck in the morbid mud of emotional frustration. Later, in his autobiography, Jawaharlal Nehru sought, in a halting manner, to defend the Bardoli decisions; the movement might have got out of hand and a bloody struggle ensued, which the Government very likely would have won. Obviously, he forgot Marx's classic adjuration that history would indeed be easy to make on the basis of infinitely infallible chances. And even Jawaharlal had to admit that there was demoralisation, dangerous in its consequences, all over the country : "It is possible that this sudden bottling up of a great movement contributed to a tragic development in the country.....the suppressed violence had to find a way out, and in the following years this perhaps aggravated the communal trouble."[13]

At the time of the Moplah outbreak, Gandhi did not even suggest calling off the movement. Now he was adamant that the campaign must cease. Little over a month ago, he spurned chances of a settlement which great colleagues like Das and Nehru did not wish to ignore. And now, he chose to make the country eat the humble pie. If non-violence was to him a supreme value and the standard by which all actions must be judged, he had not always been consistent in that belief, and

it was unfair to expect such doctrinal purism in the Congress organisation which had accepted non-violence more by way of expediency than of rigid principle. Years later, in his weekly *Harijan,* (April 12, 1942), Gandhi wrote : "I adhere to the opinion that I did well to present to the Congress non-violence as an expedient. I could not have done otherwise, if I was to introduce it into politics." Gandhi never swore, of course, by consistency, but the whole proceeding does not hang together and leaves a sour taste in the mouth.

There was nothing now to prevent the Government striking with full confidence, and on March 10, 1922, Gandhi was arrested, and a week later, sentenced to six years' imprisonment. He was released, however, early in 1924, after he had undergone, in the jail hospital, an operation for appendicitis. But meanwhile, there was a fatal ebb in the tide of the movement.

On the eve of his arrest and during his trial Gandhi spoke and wrote words that are engraven in India's memory and almost wiped off the tears that his action after Chauri Chaura drew from her eyes. "India would not challenge with success the most determined people of the world", said an insolent telegram from Lord Birkenhead and Mr. Montagu, and in answer Gandhi wrote in "Young India" on February 23, "How can there be any compromise whilst the British lion continues to shake his gory claws in our faces ?.....It is high time that the British people were made to realise that the fight that was commenced in 1920 is a fight to the finish, whether it lasts one month or one year or many months or many years....." In court, as a preface to his statement during trial he said : ".....I knew that I was playing with fire. I ran the risk and if I was set free I would still do the same.....I wanted to avoid violence. Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed. But I had to make my choice. I had either to submit to a system which I considered had done irreparable harm to my country, or incur the risk of the mad fury of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips. I know that my people have sometimes gone mad. I am deeply sorry for it, and I am therefore here to submit not to a light penalty but to the highest penalty.....But by the time I have finished with my

statement you will have a glimpse of what is raging within my breast to run this maddest risk which a sane man can run."

The statement at the trial more than deserves quotation in extenso, but some excerpts alone can be given :

"My public life began in 1903 in South Africa in troubled weather. My first contact with British authority in that country was not of a happy character. I discovered that as a man and an Indian, I had no rights. More correctly, I discovered that I had no rights as a man because I was an Indian. But I was not baffled. I thought that this treatment of Indians was an excrescence upon a system that was intrinsically and mainly good. I gave the Government my voluntary and hearty co operation, criticising it freely where I felt it was faulty but never wishing its destruction.....But all that hope was shattered (after the War).....I came reluctantly to the conclusion that the British connection had made India more helpless than she ever was before, politically and economically.....Little do town-dwellers know how the semi-starved masses of India are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for the work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realise that the Government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, no jugglery in figures, can explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers in India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unparalleled in history....."[14]

The master was stowed away in prison, and the people plumbed the depths of despair. Was the movement, when it was halted, really going to pieces, as Jawaharlal argued, "in spite of its apparent power and the widespread enthusiasm" ? That does not appear to be the Government's view of the situation on the eve of Bardoli, and in a matter of this sort, a proud administration like the British is less likely to err. "The lower classes in the towns", cabled the Viceroy to the Secretary of State on February 9, "have been seriously affected by the non-co-operation movement. In certain areas the peasantry have been affected, particularly in parts of the Assam

valley, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa and Bengal. As regards the Punjab, the Akali agitation has penetrated to the rural Sikhs. A large proportion of the Muhammadan population throughout the country are embittered and sullen..... The Government of India are prepared for disorder of a more formidable nature than has in the past occurred, and do not seek to minimise in any way the fact that great anxiety is caused by the situation." Lord Lloyd, Bombay's domineering Governor, said in an American interview: "He (Gandhi) gave us a scare! His programme filled our jails. You can't go on arresting people for ever, you know—not when there are 319,000,000 of them. And if they had taken his next step and refused to pay taxes, God knows where we should have been!"[15]

Deshbandhu C. R. Das, coming out of jail in 1922, said in a famous Amraoti speech that Gandhi had "bungled and mismanaged". He yielded to none in his homage to the leader; in his address to the Gaya Congress he compared Gandhi with Jesus Christ and called his comfortable critics "the Scribes and Pharisees"; but he could see no sense in Gandhi's spirited refusal of compromise terms in December 1921 and abject retreat two months later. Das was not alone in this view which was held perhaps by the majority of Congressmen, though many would not profess it.

It is necessary also to recall that in the Bardoli retreat resolution, abstract non-violence was not by any means the only issue involved, and that no less than three of its seven clauses urgently emphasised the obligation of rent payment by peasants to landlords or to Government, and referred to the landlords' "legal rights". It is clear that Gandhi and his colleagues feared and disliked the awakening activity and militancy of the masses. This, indeed, was a principal reason of the failure of non-co-operation.

Never before had the country resounded so mightily to cries of "Hindu-Musalman-ki-Jai". Never before had a leader emerged of Gandhi's incomparable quality. The pity of it was that, from the standpoint of the Indian revolution, if not of abstract morality, Gandhi's doctrinal allegiance inhibited his leadership. And so this man who spoke out so magnificently against exploitation of India's masses largely did what the exploiting interests wanted—the people's upsurge was like

pawns on the counter of bargain with the British and when it threatened to go out of hand and smash British and Indian vested interests, the reins were tightly pulled back. If, of course, the people's maturity had advanced enough, the leader, however eminent, could not have his own way. Our people, aflame with a new hope for a while, had shown its mettle during those years, but many more trials and tribulations were still in store.

Notes To Chapter V

[1] Quoted in W. C. Smith, "Modern Islam in India" (1946) p. 201.

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 220-203.

[3] Rajendra Prasad edited a selection of articles from "Young India, 1919-22", which is worth a lot more than many books written on Gandhi and Gandhism. It is the sort of book to beg, borrow or steal.

[4] Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. II, pp. 12-13. See also the article on "Non-violent Non-co-operation—the Technique of the Indian Bourgeoisie" in "New Age" (Monthly), August 1954.

[5] Valentine Chirol, "India Old and New", pp. 190-91; Hiren Mukerjee, "India Struggles for Freedom", pp. 114-17.

[6] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography", pp. 73, 76; Subhas Chandra Bose, "The Indian Struggle, 1920-34" p. 68; R. P. Dutt, "India Today" (1940) pp. 308-09.

[7] Smith, *op. cit.* p. 203.

[8] Chirol, *op cit.* pp. 297-98.

[9] Tendulkar, *ibid.* pp. 78ff

[10] *Ibid.* p. 74.

[11] Romain Rolland, "Mahatma Gandhi", pp. 105-12. "Young India, 1919-22", *passim.*

[12] "Indian Annual Register" (1922) *passim* ; "Telegraphic Correspondence", Cmd. 1586 (1922) quoted in R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 312-13.

[13] Bose, *op cit.* p. 90; Nehru, *op. cit.* p. 86.

[14] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* pp. 129-33 ; "Young India" *passim* ; "Speeches and Writings of M. K. Gandhi" (Natesan edition), *passim.*

[15] Dutt, op. cit. pp. 315-16, quoting from, among other sources, Cmd. 1586 (1922).

CHAPTER VI

A Period of Recession

Till the next great wave of our national struggle (1930-34), it was "the winter of our discontent". With the sad finale of the epic days of 1920-22, depression settled all over the country. In 1920, the mere rumour of Gandhi's arrest had caused riots in different centres. The six years' sentence in 1922 was received—no doubt as Gandhi wished it—in sullen silence. Protagonists of non-violence flattered themselves that it was a triumph of the spirit, of "a new heroism, steeled in suffering", but in reality India's spirit was dazed and benumbed. Like Timon in Shakespeare, India felt "the fierce wretchedness that glory brings us."

On January 12, 1924, Gandhi was removed from Yervada jail to the Sassoon hospital in Poona for he had developed acute appendicitis. He was operated on successfully, and soon afterwards, on February 5, Government thought it wise to release him unconditionally. Meanwhile, an ugly situation had developed in the country and there was a crisis also inside the Congress.

When the people in most of the countries of the Ottoman Empire rose and overthrew the Sultan's rule and in Turkey itself Mustapha Kamal Pasha set up a secular Republic, the old Khilafat fervour was inevitably quenched and the movement collapsed. Indian Muslims had fought to help Turkey and an old order which was crumbling in any case. They had fought at the same time, magnificently, against British hegemony in India. But failing in both, they felt, for the time being, utterly demoralised. The masses, thus, were suffering from disillusionment, and the small Muslim middle class, like its larger Hindu counterpart, turned its energies to the competition for the loaves and fishes of office and of puny political power.

From 1923 onwards, a series of communal riots scarred our record. They were often engineered, subtly, by Government which would then gloat over the sorry exihibition of Indian disunity. Most of them, besides, were in reality

isolated instances of class struggle fought in communal disguise; many a Hindu-Muslim fracas would start in Bombay after the introduction of Pathan blacklegs in textile factories. There can be no denying, however, that on both the Hindu and the Muslim side tempers were often frayed, and in spite of the recent fraternisation there was a lack of a common "we" feeling. This was the time when Swami Shraddhananda, whom Muslims of Delhi had invited to preach from the pulpit of Jumma Masjid, was murdered by a Muslim fanatic. This was the time when Hindu chauvinists launched movements of *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan* to bring Muslims back into the Hindu fold and organising Hindus on a communal basis, and Muslims, to whom a religious freemasonry came natural, started *Tanzeem* and *Tabligh* movements to fight back in strength. In 1924 occurred the tragedy at Kohat in the North-Western Frontier Province, where many were killed and communal tension continued long afterwards. This was only one among many instances of communal madness that has tainted our history since. After Kohat, Gandhi, only lately released, went on a twenty-one days' fast. A Unity conference met at his bedside, to which apart from comrades like Muhammad Ali there went sympathetic foreigners like the Bishop of Calcutta. The inevitable resolutions were passed, but the canker had eaten deeply into the body politic and needed more drastic remedies.

Perhaps a word here about Gandhi's fasts is called for. It is better, however, not to try to resolve their meaning in normal terms, but to quote what he said about them in connection with a fast he undertook in November, 1925 : ".....I can as well do without my eyes as I can without fasts. What the eyes are for the outer world, fasts are for the inner.....I may be wholly wrong. Then the world will be able to write an epitaph over my ashes : 'well deserved, thou fool !'. But for the time being, my error, if it be one, must sustain me..... I must be taken with all my faults.....I shall lose my usefulness the moment I stifle the still small voice within." He used to think of himself as severely sober. Once, it appears, he told Muriel Lester, an Englishwoman, that he "never heard a voice, saw a vision, or had some recognized experience of God." But his reason rested on an unquestioning faith in certain things.[1]

This was only the first of Unity conferences to be held over and over again, but with diminishing results. In 1923, the Congress and the Muslim League had taken up the question of a national pact, and a document prepared by Dr. Ansari and Lala Lajpat Rai was presented to the Congress at Cocanada in December, only to be referred back and then quietly dropped. Under the immediate inspiration of C. R. Das, the Bengal Congress had formulated a pact for the province, which Bengal Muslims eagerly supported, but a majority threw it out at Cocanada because it had conceded separate electorates and reservation of state appointments for Muslims. The signs were unpropitious, and though Gandhi took up the threads as soon as he came out of jail, and all-parties conferences and unity meetings were duly held, the picture remained gloomy. "If *azans* and *peepul* trees and noisy processions are our horizon's utter sum", Muhammad Ali declared from the Congress president's chair at Cocanada, "let us ring down, this farce is nothing worth".[2]

The problem of Hindu-Muslim unity was taken up again in right earnest in 1927. The British Government had announced appointment of an all-white Statutory Commission, with Sir John Simon as Chairman, to sit in judgment on India's fitness for another instalment of reforms. The Muslim League under Jinnah's leadership joined hands with Congress in boycotting the Commission, though a moderate section disagreed and broke away. The Congress had got in touch with other parties, and in February 1928, an all-parties committee with Motilal Nehru as chairman was set up to frame a constitution. Our spell of failure, however, was not going to break, and the reasons for it seem such that they are hardly credible.

On the eve of the Congress session at Calcutta in December 1928, an all-parties convention was held, and Jinnah, declaring his personal preference for joint electorates, proposed four amendments embodying Muslim demands. These related to 33⅓ per cent representation in the Central legislature, reservation of seats on the basis of population in Bengal and Punjab, the claim, that is to say, to a statutory majority, the vesting of residuary powers not as recommended by the Nehru Committee, in the centre but in the provinces, and the separation of Sind. "Separate electorates will probably go sooner than most of us think", Jinnah hopefully stated, but strangely

enough, the gulf between Muslim and Hindu, by no means wide, was not bridged. The Muslim proposals appear, in the context of later events, such that they should have been clinched with happy enthusiasm. That, however, was not to be, and while constitutional pedants talked interminably, the fates laughed cruelly and a narrow gulf was found impossible to bridge.

Muslim estrangement was no doubt growing worse than ever. At a meeting in Calcutta in 1928, Muhammad Ali condemned the Nehru Committee's proposal of Dominion Status for India. "You make compromises", he said, "in your constitution every day with false doctrines, immoral conceptions and wrong ideas, but you make no compromise with our communalists with separate electorates and reserved seats. Twenty-five per cent is our proportion of the population, and yet you will not give us 33 per cent in the Assembly. You are a Jew, a *Bania.*" Some of the more radical among the Muslim leaders declared themselves suspicious of the Hindus' seriousness about "complete independence", and ignoring the paramount need of unity, demarcated themselves away from the Congress which they began to declare Hindu-dominated. In 1929, Jinnah formulated on behalf of the Muslim League the famous "Fourteen Points". Some of the "points" might have been rather irritating then, but they were not particularly malevolent. Congress leaders thought at the time, disastrously as later events have shown, that the demands came from people "more famous than representative" and could be ignored with impunity. This was a cardinal error and its shadow lengthened. The poison entered the soul, and a situation developed where communalism could be deplored but hardly on any side avoided. Memories of the fraternisation of 1919-21 seemed an unreal dream.[3]

The main reason for this was that militant politics had been, since Chauri Chaura, in demoralised retreat. Gandhi, when he came out of jail, saw the Congress torn between "No-changers", who hitched their wagon to the star of the "constructive programme" recommended at Bardoli in 1922, and Swarajists led by dynamic personalities like Das and Motilal Nehru who wanted to carry forward the fight to the parliamentary plane. He had talks with the Swarajist leaders, and shrewdly evolved a formula whereby the Swarajists would

have his blessings as they worked in the legislatures, and the "No-changers" would remain his own non-violent shock-brigade, as it were, minding the "constructive programme"—khadi, eradication of untouchability, prohibition, propagation of Hindi, etc. He worked out a plan for their co-existence rather than permit them to form distinct parties. Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad were among the leaders of the "No-changers", while Swarajists included, apart from Das and Nehru, men like Vithalbhai Patel, N. C. Kelkar and Satyamurthi. It was with no little skill and patience that Gandhi managed to keep them all together. The Swaraj party was recognised as an integral part of the Congress and became virtually its mouthpiece. At the same time it was made incumbent upon them to assist such work as the promotion of khadi, eradication of untouchability and propagation of Hindi as the all-India language. His loyal "No-changers" concentrated on the "constructive programme", and Gandhi himself went round the country, tirelessly pursuing it.

This is a period when one misses the political note in his speeches, the strident note which he sounded unfailingly in 1919-22 even in his most mystic utterances. In 1924-28, his speeches were almost entirely concerned with social and spiritual questions. He was interested, not so much in rousing the people against the system which in 1920 he had called "satanic" and which he had not perceptibly charged, but against social evils which, in his view, only a spiritual reformation could weed out. In his own special way, thus, which in the Indian context was particularly effective, he was, in fact if not perhaps in conscious thought, the essential leader of the bourgeoisie, a class which wants to keep the masses under its influence, to fight within bounds for the freedom necessary for its own development, and yet to avoid militant action, even against imperialism, of a sort that might recoil on its comparatively privileged position in society.

Gandhi had a natural knack of dealing straight with the problems of the people's day-to-day life, and so while in this period he did not rouse his audience against imperialism, he spoke unceasingly of the miseries of the people and of the urgency of redressing their grievances. An inimitable example of his manner was his speech in reply to an address of welcome from the municipality of Bangalore : "I congratulate

you on your spacious roads, your splendid lighting and your beautiful parks. But while I can infer from your address that the middle and the upper classes must be happy here, I wonder if you have a poor class at all, and if you are, what you are doing to keep them clean and healthy. Have you shared in their hardships and their sorrows? Have you helped them to keep their latrines clean? Have you even thought of the conditions in which the sweepers and the scavengers live ? Have you ensured a cheap milk supply for the infants, the aged and the infirm of the poorer classes ? Are you sure that the food-stuffs that your provision dealers sell are clean and unadulterated ? I can ask you many more questions. If you have a satisfactory reply to each of them, I can congratulate you. But if you have none, then I beseech you to give them your most earnest consideration."[4]

As in the case of his own team of picked satyagrahis in 1919 and since, Gandhi was careful to have his own trained and determined cadres who would feel a kind of religious fervour and generally self-effacing idealism in working for the "constructive programme" and would keep themselves scrupulously away from the taint of revolutionary ideas which were germinating inevitably at the time. He had a quality of being able to find work for different kinds of people, work that would give them a sense of serving the great cause of the spiritual, economic and political regeneration of India. They would have a feeling of superiority over Swarajists with their primarily political bent, not to speak of "terrorists" and newfangled socialists and Marxists who were, in their eyes, completely alien from hallowed Indian traditions of life and work. In the middle 'twenties, thus, Gandhi pursued an integrated but threefold policy ; he blessed the effort of a section of the Congress leadership to utilise the legislatures and strengthen, as it thereby was enabled to do, the position of the Indian bourgeoisie ; he diverted successfully the energies of numerous honest and zealous Congressmen from active militant political work to activities mainly of social reform, so interpreted as to rouse their idealism ; he built a network of independent organisations like the All India Khadi Board and later the All India Spinners' Association, which would remain a constantly ready nucleus for political struggle whenever Gandhi deemed fit to call it into being. No doubt, work

on the "constructive programme" also helped in its own way the cause of mobilising our people against imperialism, but the manner of it and its spirit also was such that the masses could be prevented from going beyond "safe" limits and endangering the social order where the bourgeoisie dominated.

As a matter of fact, the bourgeoisie was now emerging more clearly than in 1919-20 and to take the reins, so to speak, of the national movement. When constituencies formed on the basis of a very limited franchise returned members to the legislatures, the Swaraj Party's interest shifted rapidly, so to speak, from the masses to the classes. At a famous speech in 1924, C. R. Das spoke of "Swaraj for the 98 per cent", but in practice his party was the pivot of the progressive bourgeoisie, and after his death its record grew worse. Many joined it only with a view to an easy election ; the prosperous predominated, for elections were an expensive affair. In the party's programme of aims, expressions of concern for the peasant were expiated by assurances to the Zemindar : "True it is that the Party stands for justice to the tenant, but poor indeed will be the quality of that justice if it involves any injustice to the landlord." It was all too even-handed for the people's interest. After Das's death, Swarajists in Bengal helped amend the Tenancy Law so much against the interest of tenants, mostly Muslim, that Hindu-Muslim relations worsened, never to really improve again. In the Central Assembly, the Swaraj Party led by Motilal Nehru did a great deal more for the Tata iron and steel owners of Jamshedpur and Bombay than for the workers. In the post-1922 depression, the Swaraj Party brought in for a while a fresh whiff of exhilaration but the masses hardly figured on its map. Gandhi's "no-changers" had more direct contact with the masses in certain areas, but they held fast to a rigid non-militancy in outlook.

So when in May 1925, shortly before his death, C. R. Das made in his Faridpur speech an offer of co-operation to Britain, Gandhi was there in person to, as it were, underwrite it. At exactly the time when Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India, spoke sneeringly of "the unsubstantial ghost of Indian nationalism" and said he could not envisage Indian freedom in a hundred years, Das saw "a change of heart" and said that independence was to his mind "a narrower ideal

than that of Swaraj". When Das died, with a whole people shaken to its depths in mourning, Gandhi revived the olive branch. "Cannot this glorious death be utilised", he wrote, "to heal wounds and forget distrust ?"

In spite of the Indian bourgeoisie's desire for a political settlement, imperialism, aware of the recession of the mass upsurge, tried to press home its advantage. Having failed in their declared ambition of "ending or mending" the Councils and of "wrecking the reforms", the Swaraj Party, with Gandhi's blessing, staged a walk-out from all legislative bodies in March 1926, but so pathetic was the position that the party, with *ad hoc* permission from the Congress Working Committee, would often walk in for discussion of subjects of special importance and walk out again—a state of affairs which led one liberal to call them "peripatetic patriots" and another dubbed their comings and goings as "patriotism in locomotion". The result of it all was that at the elections of 1926, the party stood again but except in Madras suffered a rude set-back.

Imperialism refused to let slip this opportunity, and when the Swarajists, shying away from mass movements, were driven to pleading for terms of conciliation, it launched an offensive. The Currency Bill of 1927, the establishment of the rupee ratio at 1s. 6d. in the face of nearly universal Indian protests, and the new Steel Protection Bill of 1927 which undermined the protection of the 1924 Act by introducing preferential rates for British steel, were the instruments of the offensive. Even the bourgeoisie would turn at such belabouring, and it had recently forged with Gandhi and the Congress much stronger links than hitherto. It is not entirely without significance that from 1924-25, writes G. D. Birla, one of the very top men among Indian capitalists, "the reader (of Birla's "In the Shadow of the Mahatma") will have observed frequent references by Bapu to financial matters in his letters". "I was doing my best", Birla continues, "to support him with money—the commodity which he most lacked—in his struggle to help the depressed classes. These references will continue to appear in his letters; they indicate his acute and practical competence in business matters." It is notable also that his earlier financial helpers like Ambalal Sarabhai had unfailingly continued the good work. Even

such close political associates as Jamnalal Bajaj, who had reportedly placed all his property at the disposal of the national movement, had retained their position of power at the Stock Exchange and elsewhere. Talking in May 1942 to Louis Fischer, Gandhi is reported to have said that "practically all of the Congress budget 'came from rich capitalists', and though 'actually we are very little influenced by the thinking of the rich', 'it creates a silent debt'."[5]

When in 1927, Indian political expectations got a slap in the face by the announcement of the all-white personnel of the Simon Commission, even the bourgeoisie felt that something had to be done if India's interests were not to be submerged and her self-respect obliterated, and that something, however, had to be different from what radical Indian groups were gravitating towards. This was the time when frustration after non-co-operation's failure had led to the recrudescence of terrorism, especially in its home province, Bengal, and Government had recourse to its wonted weapons of legalised violence. Much more important, however, was the awakening of mass forces to a new life of their own, to independent political aims, and to active struggle not only against imperialism but also at the same time against its junior, and often discontented partner, the Indian exploiter. In the mid-nineteen-twenties the industrial working class was emerging as an important factor, fighting for its rights and evolving its own leadership. For the first time also, the new ideology of the working class—Socialism—had begun to develop in India and penetrate to the radical and youthful section of Indian nationalists. Imperialism kept, of course, a sharp look-out, and at the Kanpur Conspiracy trial of 1924, sentenced to long terms of imprisonment pioneers of Marxism in India like Muzaffar Ahmad and Dange. During 1926-27, the growth of the Communist-inspired Workers' and Peasants' Party signalled the advance of trade unionism and the phenomenal strike movement of 1928. Nearly thirty-two million working days were lost on account of the wave of strikes that year, but it did not daunt our working class. About 70,000 members were enrolled in the Girni Kamgar Union, the Red Flag union of Bombay textile workers, grandest of trade unions in Asia. The G.I.P. Railway Union, the jute workers' union in Bengal and the short-lived but

magnificent organisation of the E. I. Railway workers cannot be easily forgotten. The rising militant consciousness of the trade unions, evidenced best of all in the successful six-month strike of 150,000 Bombay textile workers in 1928, gave the Government a premonition of what could soon be expected. Inevitably, this development threw its reflection on the national movement, and in the Congress a new left wing, with which Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose were prominently associated, came into the picture.

Gandhi disliked these symptoms and wanted to put his foot down. At the Madras Congress (1927) a resolution on complete independence and boycott of British goods was adopted. For some time Gandhi, though tirelessly wandering all over the country at the risk of his health and often offering much-sought advice to the Congress leadership, had been in a kind of theoretical retirement from active politics. He attended the open session of the Congress at Madras, but took no part in shaping its policy. The resolution on independence as well as on boycott of British goods was repugnant to him, and he commented caustically : "The Congress stultifies itself by repeating year after year resolutions of this character when it knows that it is not capable of carrying them into effect. By passing such resolutions we make an exhibition of our impotence, becoming the laughing-stock of critics, and involve the contempt of our adversary. The Congress cannot become the irresistible force it was and is intended to be if its resolutions are ill-conceived and are to remain merely paper resolutions. We have almost sunk to the school-boys' debating society".[6] This was, indeed, a different Gandhi from the one who in 1921 spoke of the Government as "satanic", and confidently promised his country Swaraj by the end of the year, for otherwise life was not worth while.

Gandhi could feel, however, the pulse of the people, and he knew that the slogan of complete independence was rapidly gaining ground. In the *hartals* and the massive anti-Simon Commission demonstrations in 1928, the organised working class took a conspicuous part. The new face of Indian nationalism frightened the more powerful section of the leaders, and they looked to Gandhi for showing a way out. For some time an eleventh-hour effort was made for a compromise with imperialism ; the Motilal Nehru Report (1928)

envisaged Dominion Status, and at the Calcutta Congress (December 1928), where the elder Nehru presided, Gandhi came out of his self-chosen seclusion to plead successfully for the postponement of the struggle. His strategy was, indeed, skilful. "It is an open secret", he said, "that we have in our camp sharp differences of opinion as to the lead Congressmen should receive in connection with the epoch-making report of the All-Parties Committee." He then struck a middle path and proposed that "the Congress shall not be bound by the constitution (Dominion Status) if it is not accepted before the 31st December, 1930, and provided further that in the event of non-acceptance by the British Parliament of the said constitution by that date, the Congress will revive non-violent non-co-operation." He added : "I do not want you to water down your goal. The fire of independence is burning just as brightly in my breast as in the most fiery breast in this country; but ways and methods differ, and it may be when I am nearing my destiny on this earth I may feel weakened. You will not then listen to me, then hiss me out of the platform." Jawaharlal Nehru opposed him—"I have felt it incumbent to do so because of the very teaching I have learnt at his feet"—but then Gandhi mollified the opposition by giving the British Parliament a year's ultimatum (instead of two years). Even so, the compromise resolution was opposed in the open session, but Gandhi had his way, Subhas Bose's amendment being defeated by 1350 to 973 votes. Both Jawaharlal and Subhas voted in the minority, though earlier they had agreed to the compromise. Gandhi was hurt and said : "You may take the name of independence on your lips, as the Muslims utter the name of Allah or the pious Hindus utter the name of Krishna or Rama, but all that muttering will be an empty formula if there is no honour behind it. If you are not prepared to stand by your words, where will independence be ? Independence is a thing made of sterner stuff. It is not made by the juggling of words".[7]

Once again, in this battle of wits, Gandhi came out on top. This was seen during the Congress session itself. Fifty thousand organised workers had marched to the meeting and for two hours were in possession of the 'pandal' ; sticklers for procedural propriety, even the radical Nehru and Bose, tried their hardest to get them to leave the pandal, and it was only

the personality and persuasion of Gandhi (and the elder Nehru) that made them leave after their demands had been heard and assured consideration.

The year 1929 was the year of preparation, and there was an overwhelming consensus that Gandhi should stand at the head of the Congress organisation. There were some who wanted Vallabhbhai Patel who had led a strikingly successful peasants' struggle in Bardoli and was known thence as 'Sardar'. With a natural mastery of approach, however, he preferred to put up as his nominee Jawaharlal Nehru who "is undoubtedly an extremist thinking far ahead of his surroundings but he is humble and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point." Gandhi, indeed, had to make a gesture towards youth and patriotic militancy which Jawaharlal represented, but throwing his mantle, as it were, on the younger and more highly strung successor, he sought to make sure that what he deemed impetuosity was restrained. Referring to steam "which becomes a mighty power only when it allows itself to be imprisoned in a strong little reservoir and produces tremendous motion", he added : "Even so, have the youth of the country of their free will to allow their inexhaustible energy to be imprisoned, controlled and set free in strictly measured and required quantities".[8] Thus Gandhi took the initiative to ensure that the left-wing movement, with its face set towards socialism, was brought effectively within the framework of his leadership, and Jawaharlal, fretting not unfrequently, would find himself a prisoner of the master's charm and strategy.

Meanwhile, imperialism was sharpening its offensive, and the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, spoke before the Central Legislative Assembly in January 1929 on "the disquieting spread of communist doctrines". In view of the Speaker's (Vithalbhai Patel) casting vote against a drastic Public Safety Bill, it was issued as an Ordinance, and in March, 1929 some thirty-two leaders of the working class movement, many of them avowed communists, were picked out from all over India and brought to sleepy Meerut, far from any big industrial centre, for a trial that was to become one of the longest, most elaborate and notorious State trials in history. The main aim of this stroke was to decapitate the working class of its leadership when the national struggle was due in 1930 and

also, by raising the bogey of communism, to drive a wedge between the dominant national leadership and the working class.

The Congress session at Lahore as the year ended was eagerly looked forward to, and the left, though mystified by Gandhi's refusal of the Congress presidentship, was not unhappy at Jawaharlal's selection. A shock came, however, in October-November 1929, when the Viceroy made a declaration on "the goal of Dominion Status" to be reached at some unspecified future date as "the natural issue of India's constitutional progress", and in response, Gandhi, along with Mrs. Besant, the two Nehrus, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and others, signed what is known as the Delhi Manifesto offering co-operation "to evolve a scheme for a Dominion constitution suitable to India's needs". Jawaharlal later judged his action as "wrong and dangerous", but he was, he admitted, "talked into signing" and then "calmed by a soothing letter from Gandhiji". It was really an amazing incident; it happened in the context of the heroism of a Bhagat Singh and the self-immolation in jail of a Jatin Das. There was confusion and consternation in Congress ranks; the unpredictability of Gandhi was clear once again, and the London *Times* rejoiced on November 4, 1929: "What last night's statement means is the scrapping of the programme on which Congress was to have met at Lahore".[9]

It is worth reflecting at this stage that in India what is called "mob violence" in political struggle had never been particularly marked—the worst features of mob violence were seen rather in communal conflict and in political passion only when tinged by the communal poison as in the case of the Moplah revolt in 1921. The dominant national leadership had not succeeded in tackling the problem of communalism, and as we have noted before, the pathetic futility of unity conferences unrelated to the living conditions of a suffering people, had only accentuated the sense of frustration. Instead, however, of applying themselves to a solution of the communal problem—the footling little quarrel over separate electorates and the so-called "Fourteen Points" is too tragic for words—the chief leaders of the country, Gandhi the most eminent of them all, strained every nerve to keep political movements away from anti-imperialist militancy and socialist aspiration,

which alone could basically cure the country of the malady of communalism. And so at a time when the people hungered and thirsted for a real struggle against imperialism, they thought more of a settlement, cleverly manoeuvred, than of the cleansing fire of a trial that the people wanted to go through.

None was more suited to leadership of the bourgeoisie at this crisis than Gandhi himself. It seems pardoxical, for Gandhi in his life and teaching was the very antithesis of the bourgeois, and while Gandhi thought in terms of "truth, non-violence, morality, godliness", the bourgeoisie as a class, day in and day out, practises untruth, violence and immorality and worships no God but Mammon. Perhaps one should add that while it is silly to aver that Gandhi acted as the conscious and willing tool of the bourgeoisie, it will be fatuous to ignore the vital fact that what Gandhi with his stress on "the beauty of compromise" wanted, namely, an honourable settlement which will satisfy some of the country's hopes and keep off intemperate popular outbursts, coincided with the desire of the bourgeoisie for a limited struggle with Britain, for limited economic and political gains, and even more for avoidance of all possibility of revolution with its incalculable socio-economic consequences. And the bourgeoisie, including its moderate sections who fought shy even of the Congress, knew that Gandhi alone could ride the storm of popular convulsion which they were pitifully incapable of controlling. Whatever his personal idiosyncrasies, he alone had unrivalled mass prestige, along with his political experience and mastery of manoeuvre ; he alone, on account of his nobility of character and selfless devotion to the people's service, possessed the key to the hearts of the people, a key which was beyond the reach of the timorous leaders. He alone could survive such disillusionment as followed Chauri Chaura, could avert revolution and yet, basing himself on strength derived from the masses, drive a successful bargain with imperialism.

At the Lahore Congress, the Nehru Report with its postulate of Dominion Status was declared to have lapsed and complete independence (*Purna Swaraj*) adopted as the creed of the Congress. The All India Congress Committee was authorised "whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience, including non-payment of taxes." At midnight, on December 31, as the new year was

ushered in, the flag of Indian freedom (red, white and green—later, the red was withdrawn and substituted by saffron), was unfurled by the Congress president. On January 26, 1930, was celebrated all over India, the first Independence Day, when mighty crowds took the pledge, to be renewed every year, to struggle for complete independence, for it was "a crime against God and man to submit any longer" to British rule. Mystery still shrouded the definition of *Purna Swaraj* and Gandhi's chosen strategy. But again, for many months, the movement surged, the spirit of the people was kindled, and it burnt, a brilliant flame.

Notes To Chapter VI

[1] D. G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. II, p. 285; Louis Fischer, "The Life of Mahatma Gandhi" (1951), p. 266.

[2] "The Indian Annual Register" (1923), *passim*; B. R. Ambedkar, "Pakistan, or the Partition of India" (1945), pp. 153-75.

[3] Ambedkar, *ibid.* pp. 274-76, 280-83 and references therein; M. Noman, "Muslim India", *passim.*

[4] Tendulkar, *ibid.* pp. 363-64; cf. article on "Gandhism in Evolution" by E. M. S. Namboodiripad in "New Age" (September, 1954).

[5] G. D. Birla, "In the Shadow of the Mahatma" (ed. 1953), p. 15; Louis Fischer, "Life of Mahatma Gandhi" (ed. 1951), pp. 401-03. cf. "I did not finance the Civil Disobedience movement (in 1940). My devotion was to Bapu, to whom I could refuse nothing, and who was accustomed to turn to me for help in all his plans", Birla, *op. cit.* p. 305.

[6] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 402.

[7] *Ibid.* pp. 439-41.

[8] *Ibid.* pp. 489-90.

[9] *Ibid.* pp. 500-501; R. P. Dutt, "India To-day", pp. 322-26, and references therein.

CHAPTER VII

Ebb And Flow Of Struggle

It was on the wings of hope and exhilaration, comparable to 1919-21, that the year 1930 made its entry. In spite of the defeat of a forthright left wing resolution that "a parallel government" should be set up and workers and peasants organised to that end—Subhas Bose who moved it said later that there was no plan before Congress and "a more ridiculous state of affairs could not be imagined"[1]—complete independence had been declared the goal and a programme of civil disobedience authorised.

Equivocations, however, had preceded and were going to follow the Lahore decisions. A few weeks before the session, Gandhi wrote, in amplification of the thesis that he was "dying for cooperation". ".....The letter of a document is nothing if the spirit of it is preserved intact. I can wait for the dominion status constitution, if I get the real dominion status in action, if today there is a real change of heart, a real desire on the part of the British people to see India a free and self-respecting nation, and on the part of the officials in India a true spirit of service.....My conception of dominion status implies present ability to sever the British connection if I wish to....." A strange reflection of this trend of thought is seen even in Jawaharlal Nehru's presidential speech : "Indedendence for us means complete freedom from British domination and British imperialism. Having attained our freedom, I have no doubt that India will welcome all attempts at world co-operation and federation, and will even agree to give up part of her own independence to a larger group of which she is an equal member."[2]

The enthusiasm of the people could hardly be kept in leash. On January 26, 1930, the first Independence Day, there were magnificent demonstrations. But, as Jawaharlal Nehru noted later, "we were vague about the future. In spite of the enthusiasm shown at the Congress session, no one knew what the response of the country would be to a programme of action. We had burnt our boats and could not go back, but the country

ahead of us was an almost strange uncharted land." This, indeed, is strange language, and from the man who had presided at Lahore. The fact, however, is that Gandhi's strategy was unclear even to his closest colleagues. Early in January, he published, through an American journal, the statement that "the independence resolution need frighten nobody", and on January 30, in the columns of "Young India", he put forward Eleven Points, including the demand for the rupee ratio of sixteen pence, protective tariff on foreign cloth, total prohibition, and reduction of land revenue and military expenditure, and offered, in spite of all that had transpired at Lahore, to call off Civil Disobedience, even before it was started. To such paradoxical actions the people, willynilly, shut their eyes, for, indeed, Gandhi had become indispensable. This so-called indispensability of Gandhi was the expression, as R. Palme Dutt remarks in his penetrating "India Today", of the precarious balance of class forces in India. And so in February, in face of Gandhi's inconsistencies and unpredictabilities, the All India Congress Committee called upon "Mahatma Gandhi and those working with him" to lead and control the campaign of civil disobedience. That this was done in preference to entrusting any elected organ of the Congress with the job was due to the idea that the movement should be run as Gandhi wanted it, by "those who believe in non-violence as an article of faith." Not every one was happy at this posture of affairs, and the official historian of the Congress has been driven, as so often in his book, to strenuous special pleading. "Those gathered at Sabarmati", we read, "inquired of Gandhi about his plans.....There was no privacy about our plans. But they were not clear-cut either. They would unfold themselves, much as the path on a misty morning reveals itself to a fast-moving motor, almost from yard to yard. The Satyagrahi carried a searchlight on his forehead. It shows the way for the next step." The rhetoric is meretricious but the meaning is plain. Everything was left to Gandhi and his intuitive understanding of the mind of our masses.[3]

Two contrary stands are distinctly noticeable in the upsurge that soon followed. In his letter to the Viceroy, dated March 2, 1930, Gandhi warned: "It is my purpose to set in motion that force (non-violence) as well against the organised violence force of the British rule as the unorganised violence

force of the growing party of violence. To sit still would be to give rein to both the forces above mentioned." A year later, in May 1931, he wrote in an article : "I would welcome even utter failure with non-violence unimpaired, rather than impart from it by a hair's breadth to achieve a doubtful success." If, however, it was going to be "a fight to the finish", if there was going to be a decisive struggle for the ending of British rule and the establishment of *Purna Swaraj*, this superhuman insistence on absolute non-violence could not bring about the desired result and could at best be prized as a heroic essay in impossible ethics. It was the price that India had necessarily to pay for a unique and irreplaceable leadership.

It was in the manner of Gandhi's choosing that the movement began. "My intention", he wrote in February, "is to start the movement only through the inmates of the *Ashram* and those who have submitted to its discipline and assimilated its methods." He sent no summons to the industrial working class. He enlisted the support and interest of the peasantry, but he avoided sending them such directions as would embroil them with the landlords. And deciding to lead the fight against the Government's monopoly of salt, essential to all, he started with seventy-eight chosen disciples, on the famous three-week march to Dandi for the ceremonial making of salt on the seashore on that memorable anniversary—April 6. On the way, at Navsari, near Surat, he said : "Either I shall return with what I want, or my dead body will float in the ocean."[4]

He was not immediately arrested ; strangely enough, the Government did not appear to mind the enormous publicity given to the Salt March through the press, the cinema and every other propaganda device. For its own purposes, doubtless, imperialism kept its iron fist well concealed for the time being inside a velvet glove as far as Gandhi was concerned, but it had not forgotten to take special precautions. Even before Independence Day, Subhas Bose, the stormy petrel, had been arrested, and it was not long after Dandi that ruthless repression was in full blast.

India's debt to Gandhi is irredeemable. He, above all, taught our people as a whole to fear the conqueror no longer. He roused our dormant spirit, restored our self-esteem. In his serenity he has embodied the soul of our India. It hurts, therefore, to have to express misgivings, about the oddities

inseparable from his leadership. Perhaps, however, the country has a right to remonstrance. Gandhi has given so much to India that a great deal more was rightfully, but vainly, expected.

The temper of the people can be gauged from the fact that the mass movement went a great deal beyond the limits he set out. In his instructions issued on April 9, Gandhi had asked for the manufacture, in every village, of contraband salt, the picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops, universal spinning, burning of foreign cloth, eschewal by Hindus of "untouchability", communal "heart unity", boycott of schools and colleges, and resignation from Government service. But the people went much further. Even a leadership, subtle and sublime at the same time, could not put its own invariable stamp on every manifestation of mass discontent. There was, inevitably, an economic background to the Indian struggle. The world economic crisis of 1929-30 had projected its shadow on our country. The price of agricultural produce had fallen by nearly half, and the drop in the price of silver had hit hard the peasant's meagre savings. The rupee ratio, fixed at eighteen pence, had added eleven per cent to India's debt. Each class had reason for disaffection, and the movement, naturally, made rapid strides.

Tremendous demonstrations from end to end of India was a proud feature of those days. Young and old, men and women, braved police *lathis;* they squatted on the road in passive resistance for hours on end when processions were blocked. For some months, the district of Midnapore appeared to be no longer under the control of the Government of Bengal. Patriots who spurned death's fears raided the armoury in Chittagong; unattracted by non-violence they organised a network of revolutionaries who put cowering fear in bureaucracy's heart. For ten days, the British writ did not run in the strategic frontier town of Peshawar. The working class set up for a week its own authority at the textile town, Sholapur. The peasantry rose in a hundred places, especially in the U. P., and withheld payment of rents. Police firing and *lathi* charges seemed futile and merely provocative.

Unforgettable scenes were witnessed at Peshawar in April. Armoured cars had been sent to cow demonstration, of protest against the arrest of local leaders. One of these cars was seized

and burnt, but its occupants were unharmed. In sheer vindictiveness, there followed wholesale firing on unarmed crowds and there were many casualties. It was at this time that two platoons of the Second Battalion of the 18th Royal Garhwali Rifles—Hindu troops in the midst of a Muslim crowd—refused the order to fire and fraternised with the people. This gave the signal for massive advance; from April 25 to May 4, Peshawar was in the hands of the people and had to be "recaptured" by powerful British forces operating with air squadrons. All popular demands for inquiry into the incident were refused; savage sentences were pronounced by court martial on seventeen men of the Garhwali Rifles, one to life imprisonment, another to fifteen years and the rest to terms varying from seven to ten years.

If anything, the brave Garhwalis had given a real, courageous demonstration of non-violence and communal "heart unity", but strangely enough, Gandhi discovered reasons for condeming their conduct. "A soldier who disobeys an order to fire breaks an oath", said this amazing apostle of non-violence to a foreign newspaperman, when the first round of the struggle came to a halt with the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement. The clause for the release of political prisoners specifically excluded the Garhwalis, not to speak of the Chittagong Armoury raiders who were to rot in jail till 1946, and with characterstic casuistry, Gandhi justified the exclusion. The episode is astounding, and also a trifle sickening; perhaps it is no surprise that Dr. Sitaramayya's officially sponsored history of the Congress is discreetly silent over it. Whatever their technical deviation from the mysteries of philosophic "non-violence", understood only by Gandhi, the simple heroism of the Garhwalis remains a cherished memory.

On May 5, Gandhi was arrested. "While Mr. Gandhi", said the Government communiqué, "has continued to deplore these outbreaks of violence, his protests against his unruly followers have become weaker and weaker, and it is evident that he is unable to control them." The fact of the matter is that in spite of his incomprehensible interpretations of non-violence, Gandhi was the symbol of the people's will to be free and could not very well be left at large. And though he did all he could to check the people's urge for action, he could not entirely disown them. He knew, indeed, that there were,

in reason, limits to the people's patience. On January 9, 1930, he wrote in "Young India" : ".....Votary as I am of non-violence, if I was given a choice of being a helpless victim to chaos and perpetual slavery, I should unhesitatingly say that I would far rather be witness to chaos in India, I would far rather be a witness to Hindus and Muslims doing one another to death than that I should daily witness our gilded slavery. To my mind, golden shackles are far worse than iron ones, for one easily feels the irksome and galling nature of the latter and is prone to forget the former....." Writing in the same journal on March 27, he said : ".....There is danger in civil disobedience only because it is still only a partially tried remedy, and has always to be tried in an atmosphere surcharged with violence. For, when tyranny is rampant, much rage is generated among the victims....." On May 1, he wrote on the Government's *Goonda Raj* : "Even Dyerism pales into insignificance. The duty defore the people is clear. They must answer this organised hooliganism with great suffering."[5]

The endless repression which followed Gandhi's arrest could not hide the consternation growing in the camp of imperialism, and by the summer of 1930 there was something like alarm among the British commercial community who were hard hit by the boycott. This was noticeable most of all in Bombay, the chief centre of the organised working class and also of the progressive Indian bourgeoisie. Efforts thus came to be made for an agreement with the Congress leadership which was never particularly militant. In August 1930, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar saw Gandhi in Yervada jail, where the two Nehrus were brought from another jail to join in the consultations about the Viceroy's offer to the Congress for taking part in the Round Table Conference in London. Nothing came of it, and Congress was unrepresented when the Conference met in January 1931. On the 26th of that month, however, Gandhi and the members of the Congress Working Committee were released, and negotiations for a settlement followed. On March 4 was signed the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement, and the struggle that had opened with such promise was declared provisionally suspended.

If one feels a certain exasperation with the Mahatma's ways, surely it is the most natural thing in the world. Earlier, even before the ink on the Independence pledge was dry

Gandhi, as already noted, had propounded his Eleven Points as the alternative, unauthorised by Congress, to the struggle promised at Lahore. These points included not one demand of India's workers or peasants, and had only one which indirectly affected them, namely, fifty per cent reduction in land revenue; the others, like the rupee ratio at sixteen pence and a protective tariff, concerned mainly the bourgeoisie. While Gandhi himself had written, on January 9, 1930, that "golden shackles are far worse than iron ones", he was suggesting in March a few palliative measures so that he could call off the struggle. "Let the Viceroy", he wrote, "satisfy us with regard to these simple but vital needs of India. He will hear no talk of civil disobedience." It was an utterly unauthorised statement, but he made it. "There is a method", he added, "in my inconsistencies. There is a consistency running through my seeming inconsistencies, as in nature there is a unity running through seeming diversity. Independence means at least those eleven points, if it means anything at all to the masses. Mere withdrawal of the English is not independence. By mentioning the eleven points I have given a body in part to the illusive word independence....."[6]

When the leader, to whom the masses of the people gave unquestioning allegiance—he had the "magic" rather than the "logic" which Bepin Chandra Pal demanded in 1921—felt that way, it was no surprise that the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement was, in many respects, a most disappointing document. Not one major demand of the struggle nor of the Eleven Points was conceded, not even repeal of the Salt Tax, but Civil Disobedience was withdrawn. In spite of the demand for complete independence which at Lahore had seemed irreducible—Gandhi himself had moved the main resolution there—the Congress now agreed to join the Round Table Conference, where the basis of discussion was to be a Federal Constitution with "Indian responsibility", and agreed to the principle of reservation to the British of safeguards "demonstrably in the interests of India". The ordinances were to be withdrawn and political prisoners released, but not those among them who were guilty of "violence" or "incitement to violence", or were soldiers, like the Garhwalis, convicted for disobeying orders. Imperialism sought a treaty no doubt with Indian nationalism, but on its own terms. And though a Winston

Churchill raved at the "naked fakir" strutting up the stairs of Viceregal Lodge to treat with the King's representative, it seemed as if the history of 1922 was to repeat itself; the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement was Bardoli on another scale.

Was it that the movement was sagging, for in that case a wise halt might well be called? But Gandhi himself told later the French *Monde* that "the suggestion of the impending collapse of our movement" at the time the Agreement was signed "was entirely false; the movement was showing no signs of slackening". On March 5, The London *Times* rejoiced: "Such a victory has seldom been vouchsafed to any Viceroy". Gandhi spoke quizzically on "a Swaraj constitution", on "disciplined self-rule from within" which by no means excluded "association with England", all of which doubtless sounded highly spiritual, but concealed the realities of a demoralising capitulation.

That the country smarted under the blow was seen at Karachi where the Congress was hastily convened in March 1931. Strange as it may appear, the Agreement was unanimously endorsed. It was moved by Jawaharlal Nehru, and he did so after "great mental conflict and physical distress"; he had to fight indeed, a lot more than his accustomed qualms in giving way to Gandhi's desire. "Was it for this", he thought, as he tells us in his autobiography, "that our people had behaved gallantly for a year? Were all our brave words and deeds to end in this?" He decided, however, that it would be "personal vanity" to express his dissent and braced himself to moving the resolution. Of course, he said, and he had to, that the truce meant a breathing space during which negotiations would be tried but preparations for the next round of struggle would also be made; besides, what weighed most with his audience, it was essential to have Gandhi continue as leader. "One thing is certain", said Jawaharlal at Karachi, "that we cannot afford to be here or there and do two things at the same time. For this, I implore you to decide once for all. So far we have decided to abide by Gandhiji, and let us do so until we see the way blocked for further progress." The Agreement, Nehru said later, was "not popular"; one delegate is said to have remarked that if anyone but Gandhi had been responsible for it, he would have been thrown into the sea nearby. "Gandhiji's Karachi

speeches", wrote K. M. Munshi, "in anybody else's mouth, would have evoked resentment." Subhas Bose records that while the delegates would not have agreed to oppose Gandhiji's stand, "the general public, and particularly the youth", felt very strongly against it. No one inside the Congress, not even Bose, voiced this "larger support", and Bose contented himself with reading a Leftist manifesto. All this happened in spite of the fact that the Congress was meeting under the shadow of great national sorrow, for Bhagat Singh and some of his comrades, hauled up on charges of terrorism, were executed during the Congress session, in defiance of the country's united demand for reprieve.

It was necessary, however, to placate to some extent the left-wing trend, and principally on Jawaharlal Nehru's initiative, a resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme was adopted at Karachi. It was progressive, and included a basic democratic charter of a fairly advanced type, nationalisation of key industries and transport, labour rights and agrarian reform. Munshi, discussing it tauntingly, says : "It shocked the bourgeoisie, but did not placate the ardent Marxists." Gandhi, he says further, was inclined to postpone its consideration, but since "it was the pet child of the impetuous Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru", approved the ultimate draft. Speaking at Karachi, Gandhi said : "This resolution is meant for those who are not legislators, who are not interested in the intricate questions of constitution, and who will not take an active part in the administration of the country. It is meant to indicate to the poor, inarticulate Indians the broad features of Swaraj or Ram Raj. They were advisedly omitted from the main resolution (which gave instructions to the Congress delegation to the Round Table Conference) because that would have made the mandate for the delegation burdensome." In plain words, the object of the resolution was to rouse the common people and delude them with the idea that the Congress was fighting for the demands stated, and secondly, to secure from Britain a better bargain on the strength of additional popular support thus acquired.[7]

At Karachi there definitely was a rift in the lute. Black Flag demonstrations reminded the leaders that all was not well. Largely on account of the atmosphere of disillusionment

there broke out in Kanpur, within three weeks of the Agreement, a savage communal riot in which a courageous patriot, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, gave his life. "Non-violent" renunciation of popular movements has led, recurrently in the history of our freedom struggle, to ugly, and of course by no means "non violent", communal conflict. But that does not seem to have worried Gandhi overmuch, perhaps because he never saw the relation between political frustration and communal distemper. Like the true satyagrahi, he saw only a part of the way ahead, and he saw it through his own variety of coloured spectacles. However, while from youth conferences and student organisations came a spate of resolutions denouncing the compromise, Gandhi left Bombay for England to take part in the Round Table Conference. As he got on board, there were hostile demonstrations, a phenomenon which was till then incredible in India.

Of Gandhi at the Round Table Conference, perhaps the less said the better. "The honour of the Congress", remarks R. Palme Dutt, "was lowered by its inclusion as an item in the motley array of Government puppets brought like captives to imperial Rome to display their confusions and divisions for the amusement of Westminster legislators." This might be thought an extreme formulation, but since Gandhi's primary purpose was no doubt political, his failure at the conference was pitiful. Unable to envisage his position at the Round Table, he went as the sole representative of the Congress; Pandit Malaviya and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu also attended, but only in their individual capacity. Obviously, Gandhi miscalculated his strength and ignored the utility of numbers in a conference—Congress, if it wished, could easily get a full half of the conference membership. The communal question loomed large, and to our shame all efforts to solve it by consent proved unsuccessful. The impasse developed over the Muslim list of "safeguards", which in the context of later events seems innocuous, formulated in the well-known Fourteen Points, and the British Government, posing as the virtuous and unwilling arbiter, pressed home the advantage by decreeing several months later the Communal Award, which the Congress could, in its predicament, neither accept nor reject. The sad story of 1928 was repeated, and in a setting that humiliated even more our patriotic pride. That sad

story, however, had not made Gandhi a very much wiser man; indeed, it has to be averred that in spite of his magnificent work during 1919-22 for Hindu-Muslim unity, the communal problem was beyond his grasp, and apart from ethical exhortations, important enough in their place, he could never think of radical remedies. About the 1928 convention of all parties in Calcutta, Maulana Azad had pithily observed : "The Muslims were fools to ask for safeguards, and the Hindus were greater fools to refuse them". This double folly was advertised in St. James's Palace, while Gandhi sat and shared the ignominy. Even to the so-called Depressed classes led by Dr. Ambedkar, Gandhi did not yield half as much as he did later during his 1932 fast. A foolish competition, over the externals of power yet to be achieved jointly by all, put the halter securely round the necks of Hindu and Muslim alike.

During his visit Gandhi's role as world-teacher was well publicised, and all kinds of people, well-meaning cranks being a good proportion of them, met him and listened to him at innumerable little gatherings which taxed his strength and his time. His personality and courage—for it needed nothing less to face, as he purposely did, Lancashire workers whom his boycott had injured—made a great impression. But the main purpose of his visit—Indian freedom—seemed pushed to the background. "It is for friendship I crave", he pleaded at the plenary session of the Round Table Conference; "My business is not to throw overboard the slaveholder and tyrant. My philosophy forbids me to do so, and to-day the Congress has accepted that philosophy, not as a creed as it is to me, but as a policy." For all that, he came back home, empty-handed.[3]

The great man had gone to Europe in his loin-cloth—"you people wear plus-fours, mine are minus fours", he joked in his inimitable way. More seriously, he said it was "the dress of my principals, the people of India", and it was a proud gesture indeed. Apart from meeting such disparate people as George V—"the King", Gandhi jested, "had enough on for both of us"—and Mussolini, he saw men like Charlie Chaplin and Bernard Shaw and Romain Rolland, who had already in 1924 written a great book on the Mahatma. With his charm and the grandeur of soul he wore so lightly, he made, of course, a profound impression. "Why, that is not

a man but a *Phenomenon*. You must really give me some time to recover from the shock", said Bernard Shaw to a correspondent. To Gandhi himself, G. B. S. said, "You and I belong to a very small community on earth", and gallantly called himself 'Mahatma Minor' while Gandhi was 'Mahatma Major'. Rolland saw in him, as he knew, "traits similar to Vivekananda", "and yet not a single political ruse catches him unprepared". It was a great meeting, for to Rolland, Gandhi was the "St. Paul of our own days" because of his conversion in South Africa to what he became, and at the same time like St. Francis of Assissi. More hardened intellectual folk in Oxford and Cambridge questioned him for hours on end to be themselves defeated by his Socratic equability of temper. The story of Gandhi's visit is a proud one indeed, but in view of its principal purpose, a story of failure.[9]

On the voyage back home, Gandhi cabled the India Office from Port Said that he would do all in his power for peace. At the Round Table Conference he had cajoled and pleaded and occasionally flared up, of course in his own quiet way. "I shall be here as long as I am required, because I do not want to revive civil disobedience", he said once. "I want to turn the truce that was arrived at in Delhi into a permanent settlement. But for heaven's sake give me, a frail man sixty-two years gone, a little bit of chance. Find a little corner for him and the organisation that he represents." In his first speech before the plenary meeting, he had said : "I shall hope against hope. I shall strain every nerve to achieve an honourable settlement for my country. .....It can be a matter of no joy and comfort to me to lead them again to a fight of that character, but if a further ordeal of fire has to be our lot, I shall approach that with the greatest joy and the greatest consolation that I was doing what I felt to be right, that the country was doing what it felt to be right." Once, in this speech, in some exasperation he had cried out : "Will you not see the writing that these terrorists are writing with their blood ?"

Gandhi, however, had reckoned without his host. It appears that on arrival in Bombay on December 28, 1931, he drafted for the Congress Working Committee a resolution which proposed not to renew the struggle. But the government

of Lord Willingdon, Irwin's successor, was determined to take the offensive.

Even before Gandhi's return to India, the people knew that a renewal of the fight was inevitable. The U. P. Congress Committee adopted a programme of non-payment of revenue before Gandhi's arrival in Bombay. Promptly, emergency ordinances were brought into operation in the major "problem provinces" like the U. P., the North-West Frontier and Bengal. Jawaharlal Nehru and the "Frontier Gandhi", Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, were among the many who were clapped in jail.

From his colleagues, Gandhi in Bombay heard a pitiful tale of infringement by the Government, in letter and in spirit, of the Agreement. He cabled to the Viceroy for an interview but was curtly refused. It was clear that while in London the comedy of the Round Table Conference was being enacted, imperialism in India had made its preparations. Unruly Bengal, where terrorism had raised its head again and linked up with youth organisations up-country, was given into the grim charge of Sir John Anderson with his experience of the "Black and Tan" regime in Ireland. The bureaucracy, with Lord Willingdon at its head, was determined to teach the Congress and the people a lesson.

Within eight days of his arrival, on January 4, 1932, Gandhi was arrested. Simultaneously, other blows were showered; principal leaders of the Congress all over the country were taken into detention; the Congress and its organisations were declared illegal, their offices sealed, their funds, premises and property confiscated, their press banned. Ordinances poured forth wholesale, and not in driblets as in 1930. It was a stern, ruthless challenge.

It is proud to recall how India's manhood took up the gauntlet. In four months, as the sedate Pandit Malaviya reported on May 4, 1932, there were 80,000 arrests. A session of the banned Congress, which was held for a short, electrifying period in Calcutta before being beaten up and dispersed in April 1933, was informed that the total had reached 120,000 arrests. The India League in London sent a delegation consisting of (Labour M.P.) Ellen Wilkinson, Leonard Matters and V. K. Krishna Menon, who published in "Condition of India" (London, 1933) a report of the happenings. Wholesale

violence, physical outrages, shootings and beatings up, punitive expeditions, collective fines on villages and seizure of lands and proerty had accompanied the arrests. The Government's calculation, openly stated, was that the movement would be over and done with in six weeks' time. But it took no less than twenty-nine months before the people, fighting "a soldiers' battle without strategic leadership" were compelled to give up.

Imperialism made no bones about its methods during this struggle. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State whom Gandhi had befriended in London, told the House of Commons that the Ordinances were "very drastic and severe", and that there was to be no "drawn battle" this time. A Bombay Government spokesman said that "war is not fought with gloves on." The mounting spirit of the masses found, however, no corresponding leadership. Even when the Congress was illegal, orders were actually issued against secrecy as a perversion of Congress principles—this was "non-violence", indeed, with a vengeance! A resolution was also issued, *a la* Bardoli, to the Zemindars (landlords) to assure them that no campaign against their interests would be approved. By the summer of 1932, the centre of political gravity was sought to be shifted by Gandhi who declared he was giving all his mind to the cause of the *Harijans*, ('Untouchables')—a great cause, no doubt, but surely not to be pursued at the cost of halting the national movement. On March 11, 1932, Gandhi wrote to the Secretary of State : "You will perhaps recollect that at the end of my speech at the Round Table Conference, when the minorities' claim was presented, I had said that I should resist with my life the grant of separate electorate to the Depressed classes This was not said in the heat of the moment or by way of rhetoric. It was meant to be a serious statement." The British Government's Communal Award, under which separate electorates were provided for the Depressed classes, would therefore compel him, he said, to fast unto death'[10]

So began a process, of the Congress, at Gandhi's bidding, slowly disengaging itself from the mass civil disobedience movement and turning towards the old "constructive programme" and also parliamentary effort. When the British Government rejected Gandhi's demands for modification and

clamped down their Communal Award, Gandhi undertook (September 1932) a "fast unto death" in terms of his March letter to Samuel Hoare; separate representation for *Harijans* would mean the vivisection of Hinduism which he could not bear.

The country's anxieties centred on the great man's precious life. Gandhi, as always, had the power to affect others mystically, and an anguished India watched, with fear in her heart, "the white cot of the sinking Mahatma". To most Indians anxiety for Gandhi's life overshadowed every other thought; reasoned examination of the country's real situation and the posture of her struggle for freedom was given, so to speak, an involuntary go-bye. Congress and non-Congress leaders, including leaders of the Depressed classes, met at his bedside and elsewhere repeatedly. Ambedkar, comparatively unmoved, bargained strongly, and an agreement was arrived at, the so-called Poona Pact, which considerably increased the number of reserved seats for the Depressed classes. The British Government, relieved that it was not to be left with Gandhi's corpse on its hands, promptly accepted the amendment, and Gandhi broke his fast. It was a tense drama, which in any but the Indian setting might have looked slightly laughable, but here it was touching, almost sublime, with Tagore singing hymns to a frail man who seemed, by faith, to have moved mountains.

Whatever the ethical implications of the Fast, it served, if one thinks of brass-tack realities, to distract attention from the national struggle which needed to be nursed back carefully to strength and self-assertion. Apart from the *Harijan* question, the problems of Hindu-Muslim unity which disappeared, like mist before sunlight, when a true summons came to national struggle, required to be tackled, but Gandhi had asked the nation to set its face away from struggle. If, however, the Fast had "truly shattered the structure of untouchability", one might think of it as having been more than worth while. But wrestling with Ambedkar over seats, 'primaries' and referendums, showed how the problem of the Depressed classes was to continue, very much alive and kicking. No doubt, for a time during the Fast, a magic wave of enthusiasm among Hindus seemed to put the seal of doom on "untouchability", but the wave, while leaving traces, passed

after a while. And while this happened, the leader, directing civil disobedience efforts to be channelled into *Harijan* welfare work, relinquished a struggle that deserved, on any account, a better fate.

Perhaps on this matter of the Fast and its sequel, the assessment, more than fair to Gandhi, comes naturally from Jawaharlal Nehru, and rather extended extracts from his writings might help understanding. ".....What a capacity he (Gandhi) had to give shocks to people!", writes Nehru. "Suddenly all manner of ideas rushed into my head; all kinds of possibilities and contingencies rose up before me and upset my equilibrium completely..... The personal aspect was powerful enough, and I thought with anguish that I might not see him again..... And then I felt annoyed with him for choosing a side issue for his final sacrifice. What would be the result on our freedom movement? Would not the larger issues fade into the background, for the time at least? And if he attained his immediate object and got a joint electorate for the depressed classes, would not that result in reaction and a feeling that something had been achieved and nothing more need be done for a while? And was not his action a recognition, and in part an acceptance, of the Communal Award and the general scheme of things as sponsored by the government? Was this consistent with non-co-operation and civil disobedience? After so much sacrifice and brave endeavour, was our movement to tail off into something insignificant?

"I felt angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent references to God in connection with it. He even seemed to suggest that God had indicated the very date of the Fast. What a terrible example to set!

".....So I thought and thought, while confusion reigned in my head, with anger and hopelessness, and love for him who was the cause of this upheaval.....

"And then a strange thing happened to me. I had quite an emotional crisis, and at the end of it I felt calmer, and the future seemed not so dark. Bapu had a curious knack of doing the right thing at the psychological moment, and it might be that his action—impossible to justify as it was from my point of view—would lead to great results; not only in the narrow

field in which it was confined, but in the wider aspects of our national struggle....." [11]

It is clear that Jawaharlal Nehru, after a wrestle with himself, permitted his love and loyalty to Gandhi to determine his judgment of an important event. It was "impossible to justify from my own point of view", as he put it himself, but Gandhi was a "magician", and "how can I", he cabled to his master, "presume to advise a magician". No doubt it is touching evidence of Gandhi's amazing hold on people : Jawaharlal was not alone in feeling the way he did. But the excitement of the Fast days was soon over, and it became plain that for Congressmen thenceforth *Harijan* work would be the primary pre-occupation and the struggle which had begun again with such high hope left cynically in the lurch.

In May 1933, still in jail, for the government was taking no chances, Gandhi undertook yet another of his many fasts, not aimed against the administration and its policy of repression (the Calcutta session of the Congress was held illegally in April and ruthlessly broken up), but "for purification of myself and my associates, for greater vigilance and watchfulness in connection with the *Harijan* cause." Whether "purification" happened or no, the Government decided to release him unconditionally. The acting president of the Congress sought his advice, and having received it, announced suspension of the civil disobedience movement for six weeks. "All this depressed me", wrote Nehru. "It was painful to watch this slow decay of our great movement." Was it "decay" or deliberate debilitation ? Angrily, V. J. Patel (who had been president of the Central Legislative Assembly), and Subhas Bose, then in Europe, issued a manifesto pointing out Gandhi's "confession of failure" and calling for a radical reorganisation of the Congress "on a new principle, with a new method, for which a new leader is essential."

It was a pathetic, and not particularly helpful, manifesto, for the two stalwarts could not from overseas just wish into existence a new method and a new leadership. Gandhi remained on the field, and there was no alternative leadership, strong and understanding enough in sight. In July, he begged the Viceroy for an interview, which the insolent proconsul refused. There were reasons for the insolence, for the Congress leadership had decided on capitulation. Mass civil disobedience was

withdrawn, and only individual civil disobedience permitted as a token of resistance. At the same time, under orders of the acting president whom Gandhi was advising, all Congress organisations were dissolved. Even such contrition did not satisfy the government, and repression against individual civil reisters was intensified. In August, even Gandhi himself was arrested, but he fasted again and was released before the month was out. It was a slightly confusing, and at to-day's distance of time, a somewhat humiliating situation. Then, on conscientious grounds, Gandhi decided to keep away from politics and went on a *Harijan* tour. "Meanwhile, the struggle dragged on, "neither ended, nor led."

An end was put to the agony in May 1934 when the All India Congress Committee, now deemed toothless, was allowed to meet at Patna and decided to call off civil disobedience of every sort unconditionally, except for a proviso, which seems to have been face-saving, that Gandhi alone, if and when he thought it necessary, could offer civil resistance. A month earlier, Gandhi had advertised his view of the reasons for the failure of the movement. "I feel that the masses have not yet received the message of satyagraha owing to its adulteration in the process of transmission. It has become clear to me that spiritual instruments suffer in their potency when their use is taught through non spiritual media..... The indifferent civil resistance of many.....has not touched the hearts of the rulers." Mass movements, that is to say, had been seen to be uncontrollable, and even the transition from mass to individual resistance had not solved the problem. Satyagraha, therefore, it was coldly deduced. "needs to be confined to one qualified person at a time." "In the present circumstances only one, and that myself, should for the time being, bear the responsibility of civil disobedience." One does not, recalling these philosophisings, know whether to laugh or to cry. It was the *reductio ad absurdum* of Gandhian practice.[12]

Inevitably, in this atmosphere of dismay, the thoughts of Congressmen turned towards parliamentarism, and with Gandhi's blessing, a new Swaraj Party, so to speak, was set up under Dr .Ansari to contest pending elections to the Central Assembly. It was too much, then, for Jawaharlal Nehru to bear, and the news reached him in jail "with such a stab of pain, I felt the chords of allegiance that had bound me to him

(Gandhi) for many years had snapped." In a beautiful and bitter letter to Gandhi, Nehru unburdened his agony : "And so the flag of freedom was entrusted with all pomp and circumstance to those who had actually hauled it down at the height of our national struggle at the bidding of the enemy ; to those who had proclaimed from the house-tops that they had given up politics—for politics were unsafe then—but who emerged with a jump to the front ranks when politics became safe.

"And what of the ideals they set forth before them, speaking as they did on behalf of the Congress and the nation ? A pitiful hotch-potch, avoiding real issues, toning down, as far as they dared, even the political objective of the Congress, expressing a tender solicitude for every vested interest, bowing down to many a declared enemy of freedom, but showing great truculence and courage in facing the advanced and fighting elements in the Congress ranks." Gandhi sought, as usual, to soothe him, and perhaps, as usual, he succeeded. "I understand your deep sorrow", the master told him, but was confident that "a closer study of the written word will show you that there is not enough reason for all the grief and disappointment you have felt." Whatever the effect of this missive on Gandhi's "chosen heir", there is no doubt that "the advanced and fighting elements in the Congress ranks" refused to be taken in.[13]

The official ban on the Congress was not lifted till June 1934, but it remained on a number of its subsidiary organisations, Youth organisations and the Red Shirts of the North-Western Frontier. In July, the Communist Party was declared illegal. A new chapter of repression was opening.

It was soon after this that, as in the mid-1920's, Gandhi announced his resignation from Congress membership. "There is a growing vital difference of outlook between many Congressmen and myself", Gandhi explained. For the majority, he noted, non-violence was not a "fundamental creed" but only "a policy". If socialist groups which he noticed growing, "gain ascendancy in the Congress as they well may", he added, "I cannot remain in the Congress". So Gandhi left the Congress, but he remained as ever, behind the scenes, the powerful guiding influence whom all must needs consult as an oracle. He assumed direct leadership again during the War crisis of 1939-40.

This is a distressing finale to the magnificent achievements of 1930-32. Those were proud years of epic struggle. Communal problems had not been transmuted by the older alchemy of 1919-21, but antagonisms were forgotten during the years of hope, and Muslim participation in the people's suffering and sacrifice was not incommensurate with their position in Indian life. The people fought as long as possible, even when virtually leaderless, and they fought with many weapons. The struggle left rich and inspiring lessons, and in the furnace of searing experience, forged a new self-confidence, pride in our common people and their resolve to fight ceaselessly till freedom was won.

Notes To Chapter VII

[1] Subhas C. Bose, "The Indian Struggle", p. 200.

[2] D. G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. II, pp. 502-04 ; See also E. M. S. Namboodiripad's articles in "New Age" (September and November, 1954).

[3] J. Nehru, "Autobiography", p. 202 ; B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, "History of the National Congress", p. 626 ; R. Palme Dutt, "India Today", p. 328.

[4] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 38.

[5] Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. III, pp. 2, 32-34, 45 ; cf. also Hiren Mukerjee, "India Struggles for Freedom", Ch. 12, *passim.*

[6] Tendulkar, *ibid.* pp. 13, 15.

[7] *Ibid.* pp. 112-13 ; K. M. Munsni, "I Follow the Mahatma", pp. 85, 93-94 ; Dutt, *op cit.* p. 338 and references therein.

[8] Subhas C. Bose, *op. cit.* pp. 304-22 ; Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 339-40 ; Tendulkar, *op. cit.* pp. 271-72.

[9] Homer A. Jack (ed.) "The Gandhi Reader", *passim.*

[10] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 194 ; Mukerjee, *op. cit.* pp. 150-53 ; Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 340-43.

[11] Jawaharlal Nehru, "On Gandhi" (New York, 1948), pp. 72-75.

[12] Dutt, *op. cit* pp. 342-43 ; Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 319.

[13] *Ibid.* pp. 319, 381-84.

CHAPTER VIII

New Stir In The Thirties

In the 'thirties, when Gandhi was most of the time in so-called retirement from politics, the Indian political scene underwent something of a change in quality. It was the period when following upon the unprecedented world crisis of capitalism (1929-32), men's minds were being drawn more powerfully than ever before towards socialism. To this trend contributed the hopes roused by the successful completion, in spite of dreadful odds, of the first Five Year Plan of the Soviet Union, and the fears generated by the rise of Fascism in Germany. Indian youth, drawn for a while by the magnetism of a Bhagat Singh or a Jatin Das, began to find more satisfying explanations of the social process in the spirited speeches made in self-defence by the Communist accused in the notorious Meerut Conspiracy case. A powerful influence was also a series of articles entitled "Whither India?", written by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1933 when he had a few weeks' respite from jail. In May, 1934, a small band of Congressmen decided to form a Congress Socialist Party, and the next month the Communist Party, in spite of its skeleton organisation, was declared illegal. These were straws in a wind that was thought very ill of by the powers that be.

Nothing that stirred in India was alien to Gandhi, and there is no doubt that he took serious note of this socialist trend, and set about in his own way to control it. Perhaps without careful forethought but very effectively all the same, he would, like a well-known character in Molière, embrace a rival in order the better to be able to strangle it. In 1928, he had met and talked to Shapurji Saklatvala, Indian Communist member of the British Parliament, praised his "sacrifice" and deplored his lack of understanding of Indian problems. Now, on June 14, 1934, he wrote to M. R. Masani, *ci-devant* pioneer of Congress Socialism, welcoming "the rise of the socialist party in the Congress", and on August 2, 1934, sent to Acharya Narendra Deva, the Congress Socialists' chairman, "a cursory criticism, by no means exhaustive" of their programme, in

order, he said, to help them organise their effort. While conservatives in the Congress leadership, like Sardar Patel, were angry and somewhat disdainful of socialism, Gandhi's method and approach were different and very much more effectual.

For some time it seemed that Jawaharlal Nehru might really and truly lead the battle for socialism. In 1934, just out of prison, he wrote Gandhi a bitter but powerfully argued letter, blaming the way in which civil disobedience had been abandoned, and the parliamentary programme was adopted, and accusing the Congress of slowly turning itself into "a caucus from top to bottom". He made acid references to the Congress Working Committee's uninformed animus against socialism—"the resolution of the Working Committee on the subject showed such an astounding ignorance of elements of socialism that it was painful to read it and to realise that it might be read outside India." To Gandhi, it seemed, as he wrote to a colleague, that Jawaharlal was the socialists' "undoubted leader"—"the socialist group represents his views more or less, though probably their mode of execution is not exactly his." So again, as in 1928-29, he formed the plan of making sure that the "inexhaustible energy" of India's youth, attracted powerfully towards socialism, was "imprisoned, controlled and set free in strictly measured and required quantities". Jawaharlal was still, to Gandhi's sober and discreet disciples like K. M. Munshi, an "impetuous" man whom only the Mahatma could mollify. This he now proceeded to do, so that the socialist wave could, so to speak, be "imprisoned in a strong little reservoir" of his own making.

As he announced his retirement from the Congress, he gave a lengthy statement on September 17, 1934, which is compounded, characteristically, of a certain sublimity and along with it, a profound political ingenuity. He said he had his differences with what he called the "intelligentsia", reaffirmed his faith in non-violence as a creed and not as a policy expedient, proclaimed his determination to pursue unremittingly the "constructive programme", and to avoid putting pressure alike on parliamentarians and socialists, with either of whom he had fundamental differences, he would keep out of the Congress and have "absolute freedom of action" in regard to his "experiment in satyagraha". In spite of repeated appeals

to him to to reconsider his decision he remained adamant, and the Congress had to be content with a resolution recording its gratitude for the leader's "unique services" and noting "his assurance that his advice and his guidance will be available to the Congress whenever necessary".

For some time Gandhi neither spoke nor wrote on controversial political subjects, but of course, it was not for him by any means a period of rest. He wandered all over the country and wrote continuously; he was never chary of interviews sought by the Press, and he was, in spite of the strain on his time and his strength, a tireless correspondent—answering communications from foreigners like Ronald Duncan, for example, who never expected him to bother about what he had written but was invited to Sevagram Ashram and became an ardent admirer. The subjects of his discourse were, in the main, *khadi*, village industries, untouchability, sanitation, cow protection, continence and such other things. Ostensibly, all this activity had little or no relation with politics, but Gandhi knew better. His twin objective, held perhaps more by instinct than by deliberation, was service to the people and power over them, and it was well satisfied by his programme of work. At a meeting early in 1936 of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, one of those organisations which comprised people who followed him implicitly, he said: "I see that there is a tendency to believe that these programmes (constructive and political) are mutually exclusive or antagonistic. Much of our misunderstanding arises out of this belief. The worker in the constructive field looks down upon the political programme and *vice versa*. But really there is no such opposition. I had thought that it was clear by now to every worker that there was no absolute division between the so-called political and the so-called constructive programmes. In our method of work there are no water-tight compartments."[2]

It was thus with a clear conscience that Gandhi, while he was in "retirement" from the Congress, was at the same time in close contact with leading Congressmen and was always available for "consultation". He had not retired from public work; on the contrary, he was nursing his own cadre, who could, in good time, be thrown into political activity, and he was busy creating the kind of political climate where satyagraha alone might succeed. His withdrawal from the Congress

was, in effect, only in regard to the routine work of the organisation, for its leadership never took a major decision without a pilgrimage to Wardha where he had set up his establishment. "This turned out", remarks E. M. S. Namboodiripad, "to be an admirable arrangement through which an impression could be created that he was opposed as much to the parliamentarians as to the socialists, and that his was a genuine programme of militant mass struggle, though the form of that struggle was different from those of the communists and socialists."[3]

At a time when large sections of Congressmen were ardent anti imperialists, somewhat suspicious of the parliamentary programme and not yet drawn strongly enough towards the ideology of socialism, this was the role which Gandhi took on, as it were, in the nature of things. He would not, like the stolid Vallabhbhai Patel or the sedate Rajendra Prasad or the subtle Rajagopalachari, waste his political breath denouncing socialism; such denunciation, besides, however he might wish it, was not likely to be effective. He claimed, indeed, to be a better socialist or communist than those who wore 'that' designation. He never made a frontal attack on the organisations and struggles of the workers and peasants; his theory of trusteeship—the 'haves' looking after the 'have-nots' as the result of a "change of heart"—was a more insidious and effective weapon and he made continuous use of it.

All this was happening at a time when, particularly after the Lucknow Congress session of 1936, there was a new stirring of the spirit in the country. A spur to the people's militancy had come on account of the nearly universal opposition to the imperialist scheme of imposing on us the Government of India Act of 1935. "If there is an Indian", writes C. Y. Chintamani, the liberal publicist, "who can enthuse over this scheme of reforms, I confess I am not he, and if I should find him I will not envy him." A leading British authority on constitutional law, Professor A. Berriedale Keith, even gave his view that "the alleged concession of responsibility" was "all but meaningless".[4] It is not surprising that in this context patriotic desperation still found occasional expression in the misguided, but courageous, thirty-year-old movement of terrorism. More important, our common folk everywhere, the worker and the peasant, were beginning to rise to their full stature, their

"hearts now more capacious", in Milton's majestic language, their "thoughts more erected to the search and expectation of greatest and exactest things."

From the president's chair at the Lucknow Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of his conviction that the world's ills, including naturally India's, could only be cured by socialism, reiterating the position he had taken up in "Whither India ?" which had put socialism on the map, as it were, of Indian nationalism. He spoke of the mounting struggle all over the world against the gangrenous advance of Fascism and sent on behalf of India a message of accord with that struggle. It was the period when, fed and fostered by imperialism, Mussolini and Hitler were strangulating freedom in Europe and Africa, and Japan, swooping vulture like on China, was aided and abetted by the sanctimonious upholders of "democracy". Nehru was India's organ-voice, condemning this multiplex reaction and stressing the link up of our struggle for freedom with the global fight against fascism and its friends. Nearer home, he called for intimate communion between the Congress on one hand and worker-peasant organisations on the other, and a special effort to win the heart of the Muslim masses who were developing ugly symptoms of distrust of, and estrangement from our principal patriotic organisation, the Congress. Speaking of the Soviets and their "monumental and impressive record", he gave his view that there had been "no such practical application of the democratic process in history", and in spite of his disagreement with much of Soviet policy, he looked upon "that great and fascinating unfolding of a new order and a new civilization as the most promising feature of our dismal age."

Nehru did not hesitate to aver that when he spoke of socialism as "the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems", he used that word "not in a vague, humanitarian way, but in the scientific, economic sense." It was, to him, not merely an economic doctrine : "It is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart." He did not wish, however, "to force the issue in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence." Here, possibly, is his Achilles heel, the root of Nehru's frequent vacillations—an artificial demarcation, which his head and heart does not accept but which he allows himself to be per-

suaded to think expedient, between the national struggle and social issues. But he was at any rate practically the one top leader in the Congress who was conscious of the emergence in the middle 'thirties of the independent political role of the working masses—Subhas Chandra Bose, professing socialism, did not have Nehru's ideological clarity and was then drawn unduly towards certain meretricious features of fascism.

Gandhi looked askance at the independent political emergence of the working masses and sought indeed to prevent it. It was a little before the session of the Congress at Lucknow that an interviewer asked him if "in preference to the *khadi* method", "small battles on local and specific issues against capitalism in the villages" could be started and used "as a means of strengthening the people or bringing about a sense of co-operation among them." Even this mild suggestion found disfavour, for Gandhi answered : "As a practical man, claiming to be an expert in non-violent methods, I should advise you not to go in for that type of work in order to train the masses in self-consciousness and attainment of power... ...If many workers in different parts of India engage in local battles of the sort you describe, then in times of necessity, the people all over India will not be able to make a common cause in a fight for Swaraj.....Through *khadi*, we teach the people the art of civil obedience to an institution which they have built up for themselves. Only when they have learnt that art can they successfully disobey something which they want to destroy in the non-violent way. That is why I should advise all workers not to fritter their fighting strength in many-sided battles, but to concentrate on peaceful *khadi* work in order to educate the masses into a condition necessary for a successful practice of non-violent non-co-operation."[5] The argument seems rather tenuous and rarefied, but its trend is plain. It frowned not only on action but also on preparation for it by the toiling masses. It encouraged the mentality which defeated at the Subjects Committee of the Lucknow Congress a resolution for collective affiliation of workers' and peasants' organisations, which Jawaharlal himself had suggested.

For a while, it appears, Gandhi made a serious effort to soak up the trickle of socialism with the sponge of satyagraha. In a letter to Narendra Deva, first chairman of Congress Socialists, he gave advice in matters of organisation. He wanted

them to take care that they "hastened slowly", and consulted Jawaharlal Nehru whenever possible. "I suggest your presenting the country", he wrote, "with practical socialism in keeping with Indian conditions instead of scientific socialism as your programme has been called. I am glad that the programme you have given me is but the draft, though prepared by an influential committee appointed for the purpose. It would be wise, if and when you settle your programme finally, you will associate with you men who have socialist leanings and have experience of actual conditions."[6]

More than his ardent lieutenants, he knew that progressive and socialist ideas had begun to spread rapidly, and frontal opposition to the tendency would only accelerate its speed. He did not conceal his differences with Nehru but he determined that there should be no real estrangement. As in 1928-29, on the issue of "Complete Independence vs. Dominion Status", he got his own way by appearing to yield and made Jawaharlal Nehru the Congress president, so also in the middle 'thirties he knew that if properly tackled, Nehru himself would help to restrain the forces of militant struggle, the forces which, on the crest of a wave of working class up-heaval, were moving in the direction of socialism. In 1937, strikes accounted for the loss of nine million working days and involved 647,000 workers, the highest figure since 1929. For the task of "imprisoning, controlling and setting free in strictly measured quantities" these forces of popular militancy, Jawaharlal Nehru was the best fitted. And so, on Gandhi's advice, what was called the Congress High Command followed in 1936-38 the same policy as in 1928-29, and for three successive years, leftists were put at the head of the Congress organisation—Nehru at Lucknow and Faizpur, and Subhas Bose at Haripura. For the 1936 Congress, the name also of Vallabhbhai Patel had been proposed, but on Gandhi's orders he withdrew, explaining in a statement that while "on some vital matters my views are in conflict with those held by Jawaharlal", the latter was "the best person to represent the nation and guide in right channels the different forces that are at work in the country." Perhaps it cost him some effort, but Gandhi knew it was very much worth while —indeed, without it, the left would have been lost to the Congress altogether. And the offer of the presidentship to Jawaharlal, who in his turn got leaders of Congress Socialists

into the Working Committee, made it easier, on account of the appearance of harmony between right and left, to keep the Congress organisation generally in the grip of seasoned conservatives like Sardar Patel, while the popularity of Nehru ensured the safeguarding of political capital which could be drawn during elections to the legislature and the contemplated struggle, on constitutional lines, against the Government of India Act of 1935 which even the Indian bourgeoisie could not quite stomach. It was with an astuteness, native to himself, that Gandhi proceeded in this matter. His fear of mass militancy was shared by the bourgeoisie, though the springs of their thinking were different—Gandhi thought in terms of what he conceived to be non-violence, while the bourgeoisie cared for nothing so much as self-interest. And so it was contrived that Nehru with his glamour of popularity and his capacity of inspiring the masses was president of the Congress, while the apparatus of the organisation was almost entirely in the control of right-wing elements. In the name of unity, the right and left co-existed in the Congress, and whenever there was trouble, Gandhi would make his "advice available", even though he was in retirement. The arrangement suited the book of reaction, and was possible mainly because of Gandhi's sponsorship of it.

During 1936-37 there was a continuous controversy inside the Congress over the issue of office acceptance in provinces where the Congress had become, after the elections of 1937, the majority party in the legislature. At its Faizpur session, the Congress had declared "its resolve not to submit to this constitution (of 1935) or to co-operate with it." The left wing argued that in view of this stand, Congressmen could not undertake the office of ministers, and further, that preparation should be made for a mass struggle in order to make possible the convocation of a real Constituent Assembly. Nehru, presiding over both the Lucknow (1936) and Faizpur (1937) meetings of the Congress, had himself advanced this point of view, but it was thrown out by a majority vote. The right wing which comprised the majority and was the beneficiary of Gandhi's support, pressed the view that the crucial, and the most objectionable, part of the constitution related to administration at the centre, and therefore acceptance of office in the provinces would not contradict the general policy of "wrecking" the

constitution. Gandhi himself professed to be rather taken with the fact that nearly thirty million people had got the vote. Nevertheless, the atmosphere in the country was such that in spite of the right wing's obvious desire to see Congressmen as ministers of government in the provinces, an outright decision was deferred. Both at Lucknow and Faizpur, it was agreed that the concrete question of office acceptance, on which a positive resolution could not then be reached, should be decided by the All India Congress Committee after the elections were over.

By February-March 1937, the election results were known. In six provinces, the Congress had secured an absolute majority. In three others, its strength was such that it could later form coalition ministries. Only Bengal and the Punjab remained after the elections out of the Congress orbit. AICC, therefore, met in the third week of March 1937 to arrive at a decision. For two days the discussion continued, and then, as expected, Gandhi produced out of his box a "formula" which the committee accepted by a vote of 127 to 70. It authorised formation of Congress ministries on condition that "the Governor will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the office of ministers in regard to their constitutional activities." The issue, however, was not forthwith settled; it took some three months of pourparler before the Congress could set up its administration in six provinces to begin with. The Governors pleaded inability to divest themselves of "certain obligations" which the British Parliament had conferred upon them. This caused tension, but again Gandhi was there to soothe it, for otherwise the people's patience, so long and carefully dammed, might break its bonds. So Gandhi, still ostensibly in retirement, came forward as the sole spokesman of the Congress. A battle of wits followed, and at last a settlement was reached. "The Government changed their ground by slow degrees and finally took up the position that though a definite assurance in terms of the Congress resolution could not be given, the essence of provincial autonomy, as envisaged in the new constitution, was the co-operation of the Governor with his ministers." A "gentlemen's agreement" was concluded, under which Congress ministers gave assurances of their "constitutional activities", and the provincial Governors professed anxiety, in terms of the Viceroy's statement of June 22,

1937, "not merely not to provoke conflicts with their ministers but to leave nothing undone to avoid or resolve such conflicts." On July 17, Gandhi explained in *Harijan* "my conception of office acceptance and what is possible to do in terms of the Congress election manifesto." Contrary to the views generally held by Congressmen, he wrote: "The Government of India Act is universally regarded as wholly unsatisfactory for achieving India's freedom. But it is possible to construe it as an attempt, however limited and feeble, to replace the rule of the sword by the rule of the majority."[7] Patient, gentle and unobtrusive sparring with the left enabled Gandhi to get away with a compromise solution which had seemed unacceptable to the country's temper. A people eager for a show-down with imperialism were fobbed off, with fair success, with the diverting spectacle of Gandhi's dramatic encounters with Government.

Still formally outside the Congress, Gandhi now became its principal director. His biographer, Tendulkar, describes his numerous articles in *Harijan* as "the instrument of instructions" to Congress ministries. Whenever there was trouble with the Governors or with the Viceroy, it was Gandhi invariably who intervened. In Orissa, an I.C.S. official who had worked under the ministers was appointed Governor, and the ministry threatened to resign. The crisis was averted by the Governor, for whom he was to officiate, tactfully cancelling his leave. Conflicts over the release of political prisoners cropped up in Bihar and U. P., and as in the case of Orissa, it was Gandhi who stepped in to pour oil on troubled waters. This exhibition of conflict and its resolution offered a kind of diversion to the people and helped subtly to take the sting off their spontaneous militancy.

However, in nine out of the eleven British Indian provinces, the ministers were Congressmen, and the people were, by and large, happy and proud that those who now were installed in authority had long been fairly regular tenants of British jails. Hopes, therefore, were naturally roused of a dynamic radicalism, but soon there was to be disillusionment. Not that the Congress ministries did nothing for the people; they did, but the people wanted much more. Working class strikes and *kisan* demonstrations became the order of the day, and the right wing, which had supplied the ministers, struck

back with repression. Apart from arrests and prosecutions, *lathi* charges and even occasional firings were resorted to. There was resentment and anger at all that, inside as well as outside the Congress. The left wing, however, got a snub from Gandhi who was from behind scenes guiding Congress ministries. When many Congressmen protested against such encroachment on civil liberties, he wrote on October 23, 1937 : "Civil liberty is not criminal liberty.....It seems to be assumed by some persons that in these (Congress) provinces at least, individuals can say and do what they like. But so far as I know the Congress mind, it will not tolerate any such licence." The All India Kisan Sabha had held its first session at the time of the Lucknow Congress, with the good wishes of Nehru among others, but some eighteen months later, Gandhi came out unequivocally against it. "My study of separate kisan organisations (separately from Congress)," he wrote, "has led me definitely to the conclusion that they are not working for the interests of the kisans but are organised only with a view to capture the Congress organisation."[8] Quite plainly, Gandhi laying down the law for Congress ministries was declaring his own class affiliation. He was, still ostensibly, in retirement ; his object, ostensibly, was still to concentrate on the "constructive programme" and to leave the Congress field to "parliamentarians" and "socialists". And yet he took one step after another to have his own way in Indian politics, to combat the people's growing militancy and to check and divert the trend towards socialist and communist ideas and activities.

He had done his job so well that in spite of a great deal of discontent in the country with now dominant trends in the Congress, the barque of left-wing consolidation, which might once have ridden the tide towards fortune, was bound before long in shallows and in miseries. It was with Gandhi's blessing that Subhas Chandra Bose, with Nehru the chief Left leader, was elected president of the Haripura session (1938) of the Congress. His address from the chair, in spite of his lack of Nehru's theoretic clarity, was unequivocally go-ahead and practical. During his term of office, however, he tried for a time, in the interests of unity, to fall in with the right wing leaders like Patel who controlled the ministries ; Bose did not, for example, condemn the Bombay shooting in November 1938 on working class strikers. But differences of an insuperable

character began soon to crop up. At Haripura, a new policy was adopted in relation to the Indian States where the people were encouraged to fight for responsible government while organisationally dissociating the Congress from such struggles. This might have been a feasible policy, but the way Gandhi offered advice to people's movements in one princely state after another was disconcerting. He took upon himself the responsibility of personally conducting the struggle in Rajkot which furnished a classic instance of how, by his own special technique, he could direct people's movements into channels "safe" to vested interests. "The first and last work of a satyagrahi", he said, "is always to seek an opportunity for an honourable approach .....If the leaders cultivate a belief in the perfect possibility and necessity of such approach, and if they have that belief, the way will surely be open to them." Shorn of mysticism, it meant that the people must not ask for basic remedies but be content with compromises that would not really dislodge the feudal authority of the princes. And so at Rajkot, Gandhi used his *ahimsa* weapons, including the inevitable fast. It is a story, perhaps even moving in little details but by and large distressing from the people's point of view.

In the sphere of national politics also, Gandhi did not hesitate to pull in a direction very different from what the Congress was apparently steering for. It is plain that the people's mandate to the Congress organisation was to oppose, root and branch, the federal part of the constitution and to demand convocation of a democratically elected Constituent Assembly to frame the future set-up. Being still paradoxically out of the Congress, though directing it with inexorable authority from day to day, Gandhi persuaded himself to declare his readiness for negotiations with a view to a compromise. To an American correspondent he said he would be content with Dominion Status and "would not quarrel about words", and when asked about "elements in the Congress like Subhas Bose and his group who want absolute independence outside the British Empire", Gandhi replied : "It is only a question of terminology. I will not admit any difference between Subhas Babu and myself on this point, though we may use different language."[9]

Perhaps this was a little too much for the "left" leaders in the Congress to meekly swallow. Obviously the right wing,

fortified as it always had been by Gandhi's support, was ready now to cease pampering the left. On Gandhi's advice, which Nehru could not cross, the chief Congress leaders decided that on the expiry of Bose's term of office, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, who could be relied upon as a yes-man of the Right, should be president. Bose, however, stood for re-election ; he was now the only one among top-rank leaders who supported the Left. Pressure was put upon him to withdraw, but he refused. "It is widely believed", Bose wrote, "that there is a prospect of a compromise on the federal scheme between the right wing of the Congress and the British Government during the coming year. And consequently, the right wing do not want a Leftist president who may be a thorn in the way of a compromise and may put obstacles in the path of negotiations.....It is imperative, in the circumstances, to have a Congress president who will be an anti-federationist to the core of his heart." The issue was thus squarely joined.

A very keen and exciting contest followed, and Bose was elected by 1580 to 1375 votes. The defeat of Gandhi's own nominee, who was backed also by nearly every important figure in the Congress, rattled the leader in a manner which was unworthy of him. It was one of the very few occasions in his life when the great man, so cool and collected in his dignity, seemed small and peevish. "The defeat is more mine", he wrote, "than Pattabhi Sitaramayya's", in a statement dark with ill-concealed anger. His followers now concertedly struck back —twelve members of Bose's Working Committee resigned, and in a letter which Tendulkar believes to have been drafted by Gandhi himself, they wrote : "We feel that the time has come when the country should have a clear-cut policy not based on compromise between different incompatible groups of the Congress. It is but right, therefore, that you should select a homogeneous cabinet representing the views of the majority." This letter seems to confirm the correctness of Bose's earlier assertion that there was, over the question of working the federal scheme, a prospect of a right-wing compromise with Britain, for otherwise the reference to "incompatible groups" makes politically no sense. Perhaps this explains why Nehru, who had denied any such rightist move, did not sign the letter of the twelve, but separately put in his resignation. Though the country thought of him and of Bose as the two chief leaders of the Left,

there was, temperamentally, a chasm between them. Besides, it was not in him to sever the links that bound him to Gandhi. He said, therefore, that his efforts at conciliation having failed and Bose refusing to withdraw his allegation of a rightist scheme of compromise with Britain on the federation issue, he also could not remain in Bose's Working Committee.[10]

At the Tripuri Congress, where Bose presided, incidents happened, at the instance, one cannot doubt, of the votaries of non-violence, over which it is better that a veil is drawn. The malice and cunning of the right-wing leadership was hardly ever so well displayed. A resolution was adopted, according to which Bose was to nominate his Working Committee "in accordance with the wishes" of Gandhi. When Gandhi was approached, he said to Bose : "Knowing your own views and knowing how most of the members differ in the fundamentals, it seems to me that if I give you the names it would be an imposition on you." So Gandhi, whom no doubt his lieutenants had consulted before the Tripuri resolution was adopted, refused any help to Bose and told him he was "free to choose your own committee". It is indeed an unsavoury episode ; the means adopted to achieve Gandhi's aim, namely, removal of Bose from the Congress presidentship, were, it must be said, rather low for the great man.

Before long, Bose was forced out, and at a meeting of the All India Congress Committee at Calcutta (April-May, 1939), Bose resigned and was replaced by Rajendra Prasad who nominated a new Working Committee from which even Nehru was excluded. The offensive of the right wing now began, and soon the A.I.C.C. prohibited Congressmen offering or organising any form of satyagraha without the permission of the provincial Congress committee concerned. There was talk of direct action in many places, action by the peasantry particularly, and action for the defence of civil liberties. To a leading Congress Socialist who had pleaded for Gandhi's support to rightful "local action even during such times when there is no general satyagraha", Gandhi's reply was : "I regret to have to say that, in most cases, the peasants are not being educated for non-violent action.....Indeed, what I see around me is not the preparation for a non-violent campaign but for an outbreak of violence, however unconscious or unintended it may be." The A.I.C.C. resolution, banning all forms of satyagraha, thus

gave rise to an intense controversy. Congress Socialists had supported Bose for a while before Tripuri, but dropped him soon with little ceremony and trailed behind an unhappy Jawaharlal's indecisions. Bose committed what seems to be a mistake in forming his own group, the Forward Bloc, for this non-chalant challenge killed all hopes of unity inside the Congress to fight the impending imperialist offensive. For some time, however, this was not quite evident, for Bose appeared to command unusual support even in areas like Gujarat where the writ of the Right was known to run. But he overplayed his hand and was soon to pay the penalty. The Congress leadership struck, and struck hard, when under Bose's leadership, public demonstrations were held on July 9, 1939, by the "Left Consolidation Committee" in protest against the A.I.C.C. resolution. For infringement of discipline, Bose was disqualified from holding office in the Congress for a period of three years. This was followed, inevitably, by the ugly scene of two Congress Committees functioning in Bose's own province, Bengal. The people watched it with distaste and waited in vain for the struggle for civil liberties which Bose had promised, and which, if launched, might have broken the stalemate and even turned the tables on the Right. Bose on the contrary conducted, not without provocation, a vendetta against the right-wing leadership, but it recoiled on him; the Congress had long been enthroned in people's hearts and wordy fireworks, without an alternative programme of action to correspond therewith, produced no more than a fleeting impression. Blaring struggle slogans when the Congress was disrupted and Bose's links with mass forces were really slender, turned out to be little better than airy ejaculations. So, with Jawaharlal fretting uneasily in the company of right-wing leaders and Bose unable to give concrete shape to his leftism, the country sulked and sorrowed, and lacked a dynamic leadership when war broke out in September 1939.

For this unhappy posture of things, much of the responsibility must be laid on Gandhi who was, whether formally a Congressman or not, the country's supreme leader. He himself, perhaps, was not unhappy, for he was the inspiration of the right-wing offensive before and after Tripuri. On a long view it appears tragic that the right-left squabble was permitted to muddy as it did the waters of our political life. Surely it could

not have been unknown to the leadership, and least of all to Gandhi, that when the people genuinely wanted a struggle for a better life hope deferred made them sick, and the frustration so born found vent in other ways, notably in communal conflicts which imperialism was ever too ready to provoke and intensify. The aftermath of 1921-22 saw, as we have noted before, a grievous degeneration in communal relationships. The upsurge of 1930-32 brought brave whiffs of exhilarating air which nearly cleared the atmosphere, but again in the middle 'thirties there was a fresh setback which, in its effects, were worse than in the earlier period. Jawaharlal Nehru at the Lucknow Congress (1936) had spoken earnestly of the need of Congress contact with the masses, and particularly the Muslims. But the advice was virtually ignored. In the 1937 elections, out of 482 Muslim seats, the Congress contested only 58 and won 26 (15 in the North-West Frontier Province where Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his "Red shirts" were a power, and a meagre eleven in all the rest of the country). The Congress leadership showed a most deplorable vacillation and lack of self-confidence when it forbore from putting up candidates for Muslim constituencies. And in all the voluminous writings and statements of Gandhi at this time, there is, unaccountably, not a syllable of regret at this lapse, not the whisper of an adjuration to his followers on this score. Not that Gandhi did not care any longer for Hindu-Muslim cooperation and harmony; his passion was too deep to be doubted. But as the leader of the people at a crucial time, he found himself too busy confounding the Left to have any leisure left for other tasks. By its obvious supineness on this issue, the dominant leadership of the national movement, which Gandhi pre-eminently represented, helped to sharpen communal misunderstanding and conflict.

As early as 1932, when the British Communal Award was announced, following upon the failure of Indian delegates at the Round Table Conference to agree on terms, many of the most unimpeachably nationalist among Muslim Congress leaders were distressed by the inability of the Congress to come to a decision about it. There was a report that Dr. Ansari and others threatened to resign if the Congress, under communal Hindu pressure, fought the Award, as was once quite likely, without first reaching an alternative Hindu-Muslim agreement

of its own. A compromise, unhappy in all conscience, was then arrived at, and the Congress declared that it neither accepted nor rejected the Award. Meanwhile, many Muslims began drifting from the Congress into purely Muslim organisations, of which the Muslim League was the most important, and there was no call or even preparation for an inspiring mass movement which alone could stop the rot. The chasm between Hindu and Muslim, grievously remarkable at election time, was to yawn wider still as time brought no balm of unity; Gandhi's recurrent emphasis on Hindu reform movements made the position worse. Imperialist machinations did, of course, have its goodly share of responsibility, but that can by no means be held forth as absolution for ours.

In 1935, negotiations had been conducted for over a month between Rajendra Prasad, Congress President and M. A. Jinnah, President of the Muslim League. It is interesting to find from Rajendra Prasad's memoirs[11] that he had "heart-to-heart talks", that they "liked each other", and as good as reached an agreement, but Jinnah insisted that Pandit Malaviya also should agree, which happy event, however, on account mainly of pressure from Bengal Hindus and Punjab Sikhs, did not happen. It was also at this point of time that, egged on doubtless by imperialist agents, Jinnah began to insist that the Muslim League should be recognised as the only representative organisation of the Muslims while the Congress should reconcile itself to being regarded the spokesman only of Hindus. It was a fantastic claim, and in the 1937 elections the Muslim League's pathetically poor performance at the polls showed up Jinnah's fallacy. But it was a mistake, thoughtlessly perpetrated, when after the elections Nehru, impatient with Jinnah's tactics, said sharply that in the country there were two parties, the Congress and the Government, and that the others must simply line up. It offended Muslim opinion, for the League, though organisationally yet negligible, was thriving already on the growing Muslim estrangement from the Congress. The position was aggravated when the Congress firmly repulsed, again rather shortsightedly, proposals for forming ministries in conjunction with the League. It was thus in a worsening atmosphere that Nehru, as Congress president, met Jinnah in 1938. The latter reiterated his "Fourteen Points", and added some more like the demand for withdrawal of Congress opposition to the Communal Award,

changing the tricolour flag and giving up the *Bande Mataram* anthem. A committee set up by the Congress recommended the deletion of certain portions of the song as likely to offend Muslim religious susceptibilities, but it pleased neither the League nor a large proportion of Hindus in the Congress, of course for exactly contrary reasons. From Gandhi in this period there emanated certain pronouncements about a "blank cheque" he was ready to sign and give to Mr. Jinnah. On *Swadeshi* paper, with *Swadeshi* pen and ink, it was said picturesquely, the blank cheque would be signed. Quite understandably, the matter-of-fact Jinnah was piqued; he said he did not care for a "blank cheque" but for his "fourteen points". Such exchanges would never have been possible if the country had better things to do, but the Left was being outmanoeuvred, the people's rightful demands were not being fought for, and in the prevailing gloom communal reaction reared its ugly head. Even so, Muslim communalism had to wear a radical robe. The League session of 1937, like the Congress session of 1929-30, declared the goal of India to be "full independence in the form of a federation of free democratic states in which the rights and interests of the Musalmans and other minorities are adequately and effectively safe-guarded in the Constitution". It adopted also, on the analogy of the Congress's Karachi declaration, a radical "economic, social and educational programme". Unless it stole the Congress's thunder, the League could not rope in the Muslim masses. Gandhi and the dominant Congress leadership, however, did not see the writing on the wall. They could not imagine that the cup of disharmony was not full to the brim yet; they had no idea that the Pakistan resolution would come in 1940 and grip the Muslim mind. A dynamic movement of the people, based on their own life's interests, was the sovereign remedy for communal aberrations, but Gandhi and his colleagues did not see it and the people they led became "as fuel of the fire".[12]

Notes To Chapter VIII

[1] D. G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. III. pp. 382, 387-88.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. IV. p. 66.

[3] Article on "Gandhi Retires from Congress" in *New Age* monthly, December 1954.

[4] C. Y. Chintamani, "Indian Politics since the Mutiny", pp. 174-75, 180.

[5] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* pp. 12-13.

[6] Tendulkar, "Mahatma", vol. III. p. 344.

[7] *Ibid.* vol. IV. pp. 175, 185, 207.

[8] *Ibid.* pp. 248-49, 295 ; cf. also E. M. S. Namboodiripad in *New Age* (Monthly), December 1954.

[9] *Ibid.* vol. V. pp. 138, 152-53.

[10] *Ibid.* pp. 36-39, 56.

[11] Rajendra Prasad, "A chapter from the President's Life", in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, (Calcutta edition), Dec. 1, 1957.

[12] References in R. P. Dutt, "India Today", and Hiren Mukerjee, "India Struggles for Freedom", *passim*.

CHAPTER IX

World War's Early Ordeals

In his introduction to "The Gandhi Reader", Homer A. Jack quotes Gandhi as having once said : "People describe me as a saint trying to be a politician, but the truth is the other way around". Throughout his career, which for fifty years was more public than that of almost any other public figure, there could be seen a sort of co-existence in his composition of the saint and the politician. This was perhaps never more evident than in the period of World War II.

Since many years ago, at Maritzburg in South Africa, he had woken to his mission of life in mankind, Gandhi could never find it in himself to keep away from where people's problems drew him, and in an unfree country such problems were inevitably, at bottom, political. If the strong ethical strand in his character had not been profoundly affected by a whole-hogging predilection for a faith whereby he could explain, to his own satisfaction, the ways of God to man, he might have been a revolutionary in politics. For all the storms and stresses of his life, however, he was essentially a conservative, to whom thoughts even of the overturning of society, however needful and fundamentally righteous, were a deadly sin to be eschewed at all costs. Jawaharlal Nehru once wondered at the "extraordinary paradox" of Gandhi "with all his passion for non-violence" favouring "a political and social structure which is wholly based on violence and coercion."[1] During the trying years of the Second World War, one finds Gandhi apparently seeking to test the powers of non-violence and yet, with an innate subtlety which was never so low and bald as cunning, working for an opportunist political settlement. From time to time one sees in him the lion-hearted leader giving voice nobly to his people's impatience with servitude, but again, with the freakishness of the unpredictable saint he would let them down. All in all, in war time as previously, the paradoxical element in Gandhi was useful, pre-eminently, to the Indian bourgeoisie who wanted political power badly enough but were afraid of popular upsurge overflowing the limits set down.

For some time before September 1939, the "prologue arm'd" to World War II had become plain. For all its hesitancies and weaknesses, our national movement, be it said, had never stood aloof from the world-wide struggle against the machinations of imperialist power politics. The Haripura Congress (1938) declared unequivocally that India would take no part in Britain's imperialist war and would resist the employment of India's man-power and resources. Indeed, the maturity of our national movement is witnessed by the fact that unlike in 1914, when not only the Princes and puppets in India but also the best-known leaders rallied to the support of the British Empire, the conflict between the Indian people and the British Government was open and sharp in the very first weeks of the War in 1939.

The Congress Working Committee, meeting on September 14, called on the British Government "to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the New Order that is envisaged ; in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and be given effect to in the present." As protracted diplomatic interchanges with the Viceroy went on inauspiciously, the masses surged ahead on their own ; 90,000 Bombay workers carried out, on October 2, a one-day political strike against the war and the repressive measures of imperialism—the first action of its kind in any of the countries involved in the war. If at this time a strident call for national struggle had come, the response might have changed our history, but that was not to be.

Imperialism, by no means yet at bay, disregarded the Congress protests against India's compulsory involvement in the war. The Congress then resigned office in the provinces and protested again, but little more was done lest it should "embarrass" the British, for it was infraction of the philosophy of non-violence, so the argument ran, to use Britain's extremity as India's opportunity. It was not till after September 1940, that the Congress, under Gandhi's lead, made a tangible, if ineffective, gesture of defiance, and in the meantime there was only a battle of words, whose aim was an understanding with Britain.

At this stage there took place an apparent conflict between Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee over their attitude towards the war. Gandhi declared that his sympathies were

"wholly with the Allies", but while wishing them to win, his "personal reaction" towards the war was "one of greater horror than even before", and, therefore, he would not be "the self-appointed recruiting sergeant" he had been in 1914-18, and would give no armed help to the British. The Congress Working Committee, on the other hand, while not prepared to render the unconditional support given to the British during World War I, were ready to help this time on a *quid pro quo* basis, that is to say, if power at the centre was promised at least on termination of the war. It is usually considered that this was a fundamental conflict, real and not merely apparent, between Gandhi's espousal of non-violence as a principle and the Congress' as an expedient, between Gandhi's insistence that all problems of internal order as well as of external attack could be solved on the principles of *ahimsa* and the Congress' conception that while non-violence was a method adopted in the struggle for freedom from the British yoke, it could not apply either in the case of internal disturbance or aggression from abroad. If the matter is examined with a little care, however, it will be seen that basically it was a tactical problem of putting maximum pressure on Britain, and the differences of approach could be more or less easily smoothed out.

It is by no means unlikely, of course, that the saint in Gandhi could not quite persuade himself to be a party to violent warfare and fondly wished the Congress to declare adherence to the principle of non-violence even for a free India, giving moral and every other kind of help, short of actual assistance in armed conflicts. It was a natural feeling for him to desire that the Congress at least should hold the banner of non-violence aloft and accustom people increasingly to think in terms of none other than peaceful action. But as the very practical man that he was and as the politician that he could not cease to be, he knew that his faith in non-violence was not widely shared and that it was not very probable for a government of free India to discard violence altogether when questions of defence and security were concerned. And so while for years he had severed his formal membership connection with the Congress, he remained also its undoubted leader and guide. In so far as Gandhi felt he had a prophetic message for the world, there was a conflict and a contradiction between his role of prophet and of a national leader. Being

what he was--the political leader of his people—Gandhi could not act purely on the personal plane and had to come down from the saint's lonely pedestal. And if one of Gandhi's characteristics was rigid adherence to principle, another, equally notable, was his capacity of adaptation to people and circumstances. The commingling of the saint and the politician made, indeed, a powerful and unusual combination.

When this is remembered, it is easy to understand how Gandhi and the rest of the Congress leaders pulled their weight together during the war years, in spite of certain apparently fundamental differences. And they could pull together because their objective was the same, namely, the wresting from the British of as much political power as possible, without throwing the country into a turmoil which the people perhaps wanted but whose end was dreaded by the bourgeoisie and would in any case have unsettling effects.

So much water had flown down bridges since the first world war that in 1939-40 there was no political grouping in India so poor in spirit as to support the British unconditionally. When even the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, both seriously hostile to the Congress, could not offer unconditional support to Britain, the temper of the time can well be gauged. The Indian bourgeoisie which had already tasted the sweets of provincial autonomy had its appetite for political power more whetted than otherwise. How to mobilise the people against imperialism without permitting them to be mobilised against the existing social order was their main headache. And so when apparently there was an abstract conflict of ideology over non-violence between Gandhi and even his clo-est lieutenants, the fact of the matter was that "behind this conflict on an ostensibly moral question lay the mundane question of what tactics should be adopted in dealing with the British."[2]

Unconditional but non-violent support was offered to Britain by Gandhi, but the Congress Working Committee, understandably, took a different line. It was still unclear how the war would shape itself. The Congress's bargaining position with the British would be weakened if, pending a clearer picture of the war, either unconditional support or support, conditional or unconditional, on a purely non-violent basis, was offered. To the Congress's query as to whether freedom would

come as the war ended, however, Britain's answer was negative. Dominion Status was promised as before, but it was to be achieved "in the fulness of time", and meanwhile only a beggarly "Consultative Committee" of Indian nominees for helping the Viceroy conducting the war was offered. In face of Congress claims were pitted what Gandhi called "the four pillars of British Indian empire—the European interests, the army, the princes and the communal divisions". Of these, the fourth was becoming an extreme worry for the Congress—the Muslim League forging ahead fast, thanks not only to official connivance but also to the demoralisation caused among the masses by the Congress's allergy towards the kind of struggle that unified and enthused. However, British recalcitrance convinced the Congress Working Committee that greater pressure was called for, and it soon found that when the people were in a growing anti-war mood "Gandhi's stand on non violence, his appeal to the British and other allied peoples not to meet Nazi militarism with counter-militarism, but to resist the Nazis with non-violent means, came in handy". To teach a lesson to the British rulers and bend their minds towards a compromise, the people's anti-war spirit, already ascendant, needed to be whipped up so that the British would find it a tough task to prosecute their war effort on Indian soil. Thus there came about a *rapprochement* between Gandhi and the Working Committee. After six years of silence at Congress sessions Gandhi spoke at Ramgarh, where it was declared that, in view of British recalcitrance, India would not help the war effort with men, money or material. Gandhi explained at length how Congress committes should convert themselves into Satyagraha committees ready for the summons to struggle against the war.

One might at this stage imagine that Gandhi really intended to act as the indomitable crusader for non-violence, out only for the victory of a moral principle. As a matter of fact, hopes of a compromise still lingered, in the minds of Gandhi and of his Congress colleagues. When, after April, 1940, the European scene began to change drastically and kaleidoscopically against the allies, there was expectation among Congress leaders that Britain, in a quandary, would welcome a settlement. There had been a change of government in Britain, Chamberlain making room for Churchill. "While the hourly butchery is going on in the West and peaceful homes are being

destroyed," said Gandhi, "I will leave no stone unturned to bring about a peaceful and honourable settlement of the present deadlock." The Congress Working Committee also calculated that a compromise was very likely since the danger to Britain was pressing, that negotiations should be started, and that in conducting them the Congress should not be handicapped by the leadership of Gandhi who still stuck to his thesis that support to the British should be given only on a non-violent basis, largely valueless, that is to say, from the point of view of the war effort. Gandhi and the Working Committee had prolonged discussion and at the end it was declared, in what is known as the "Poona Offer", that the Congress was ready to take part in a national government to defend the country against external aggression, on condition that the freedom of India was assured after the war. "Mahatma Gandhi desires the Congress", it was said, "to be true to the creed of non-violence and to declare its unwillingness that India should maintain armed forces to defend her freedom against external aggression or internal disorder". As the Congress was "unable to go the full length with Gandhiji", the latter was to remain "free to pursue his great ideal in his own way" and was therefore absolved from responsibility for the programme that Congress was to pursue.[3] It was a friendly, domestic arrangement between Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee, so that suitable pressure could be exerted, singly or by both together as circumstances permitted, for softening British resistance to political understanding with India.

Imperialism, at bay in Europe, tried frantically, however, to keep a firm grip on India, and the demand for a national government was again rejected. The Viceroy's reply (August 1940) to the Poona offer was disappointing. Indians, he said, could frame their own constitution after the war but on two conditions : first, obligations to Britain must be fulfilled, and second, "minority" opinions must not be thwarted. It was felt that the old policy of "the four pillars" was being persisted in. The Congress leadership felt it had been "badly let down", and reverted again to the unity of outlook with Gandhi, which for tactical purposes had been disavowed. Besides, the growing scarcity and rise in prices had intensified the people's discontent, and the Congress, just in order to hold on to its position, had to do something spectacular. On September 30,

1940, therefore, when negotiations finally broke down, Gandhi, once again officially spokesman of the Congress, wrote a magnificent letter to the Viceroy:

"As I made it plain in the course of our talks, the Congress is as much opposed to victory for Naziism as any British can be. But their objection cannot be carried to the extent of their participation in the war. And since you and the Secretary of State for India have declared that the whole of India is voluntarily helping the war effort, it becomes necessary to make clear that the vast majority of the people of India are not interested in it. They make no distinction between Nazism and the double autocracy that rules India."[4]

When moderation and offer of support to the war effort did not help, threat of a movement was the only recourse. The movement, however, was to be indefeasibly non-violent; it would not, that is to say, be permitted to go beyond familiar bounds. Maulana Azad, Congress President, announced that Mahatma Gandhi had been requested to resume leadership and there was "no difference whatsoever between him and the working committee". This is understandable, but it is strange that the All India Congress Committee adopted a resolution drafted, it is said, by Gandhi, setting out its firm belief "in the policy and practice of non-violence, not only in the struggle for *Swaraj* but also, in so far as this may be possible of application, in free India".[5] This was the price extracted perhaps by the Mahatma, and to his knowledge, hyprocritically paid. It is a meandering series of incidents, difficult to picture in terms of a consistent understanding. The only unsnapped thread running through it seems to be that Gandhi was acting as what he was, a saint and a politician at the same time, and that both he and the Congress, quite apart from whatever ideological professions were made from time to time, were at bottom concerned not so much with the morality or otherwise of the use of "violence" in national defence as with the effectiveness of methods adopted to bring pressure to bear on Britain. Easy transitions were made from one stand to another. The Congress ceased to swear by non-violence when the chances of a negotiated settlement seemed bright. When it was necessary to frighten Britain, Gandhi with his stress on non-violence was requisitioned, for his message could harmonise with the people's vibrant anti-war mood. It was an arrangement to

which Gandhi could, without violence to himself, be a party, because he was neither a complete politician nor an unbending saint.

The declaration of detestation of "the double autocracy that rules India" was followed up, however, with action hardly in consonance with it. Gandhi personally chose a number of satyagrahis, Vinoba Bhave, father of the subsequent *Bhoodan* and other allied movements being first of them all, who would give notice to the authorities, to save them the trouble of looking for their whereabouts, appear at a particular spot, shout anti-war slogans and be carted away to jail. The country hungered for some sort of a movement, and even this strange parade created considerable commotion. A few thousand satyagrahis were incarcerated, but there was nothing like a countrywide resurgence ; the deadlock remained unsolved ; the tribe of the Birlas, turned friends and patrons of the Congress, waxed fat on war contracts ; and the government had little to worry about. In U. P., Jawaharlal Nehru whom Government feared was sentenced to four years' imprisonment ; the savage punishment was deeply resented but the national leadership refused to transmute resentment into struggle. "For the time being", said Gandhi, "we should be satisfied with complete freedom of speech and pen"—it was not, that is to say, a struggle for Swaraj. As Gandhi said again, "This is not a struggle which can be ended quickly. We are resisting an authority that is itself struggling to fight for life against a stubborn foe.....Our struggle must be coterminous at least with the European....." Even more clearly, he told the All India Congress Committee on September 16, 1940: "It is absurd to launch civil disobedience today for independence. How are we to fight for independence with those whose own independence is in grave peril ? Even if independence can be given by one nation to another, it is not possible for the English. Those who are themselves in peril cannot save others. But if they fight unto death for their freedom and they are at all reasonable, they must recognise our right of free speech". It seems somewhat rigmarolish and tiresome, but the trend is plain. The struggle was symbolic, and it was not a mass struggle. "If there were only ten or two (satyagrahis) they would represent the whole of the Congress. 'Does not one ambassador represent his people ?' asked Gandhi".[6]

Maulana Azad, Congress president, arrested and sentenced

to eighteen months' imprisonment, had previously told the press that he had been in favour of a mass movement but "had to yield to Gandhiji". Before his arrest he had wanted to discuss with Gandhi the communal question in particular, but he was prevented. The communal question was, indeed, as on so many previous occasions, the weak spot of the Congress, and it was in this period exactly that the Congress positively lost the allegiance of most Muslims—and, as W. Cantwell Smith rightly says, "for the very simple and very adequate reason that it was not offering them anything in which they were interested". In the absence of a real movement, when all objectives except "non-industrial cloth making" and the preaching of absolute pacifism had been pretty well given up, when, a little later, even individual satyagraha was called off "in recognition, apparently, of its ridiculousness", the Congress was found wanting and communalism as a mode of thinking and feeling advanced rapidly and among all sections.[7]

Meanwhile, portentous developments had taken place in the national scene and brought a new menace that Gandhi and the Congress could not overcome, not perhaps even comprehend. In March 1940, at Lahore, the Muslim League adopted the Pakistan resolution, countering Congress nationalism with the Muslim demand for the partition of India. Jinnah, presiding over the session, said of course that the League stood "unequivocally for the freedom of India"—if one wanted to get the ear of the people, this averment just had to be made —but his main stress was on the two-nation theory. Islam and Hinduism, he said, "are not religions in the strict sense of the word but are in fact different and distinct social orders. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religions, philosophies, social customs, literatures. They neither intermarry nor interdine.....their aspects on life and of life are different." These were issues which were by no means frivolous; and even if they were, they touched, in spite of the crudity of their expression, the heart-strings of Muslim India, and needed, therefore, to be understood and appraised by a serious mental effort which, sadly, was not forthcoming. The result was bickering and mounting mutual suspicion, and the gulf between the Congress and the League continued to widen, to the unconcealed joy of the imperialist intruder who flourished on intra-Indian differences. Savarkar, the Hindu Mahasabha president,

was speaking militantly, on his part, of Hindus as a nation, of India as "the abode of the Hindu nation", the Muslim being only "territorially Indians". Gandhi himself gave permission to a leading follower, K. M. Munshi, to resign from the Congress and campaign for *Akhand Hindusthan* as a counterblast to the Muslim League's slogan. The Congress leadership never went so far, of course, but at successive meetings in 1940-41, at Delhi, Wardha and Poona, it sought agreement with the British Government over the central administration, but never, at the same time, an understanding with the League. In April 1941, at the Madras session of the League, Jinnah made effective use of a remark of Rajendra Prasad that the Congress had never discussed the Pakistan scheme as it was never referred to it by the League. "Do you believe", Jinnah asked, "that the Working Committee of the Congress never discussed the scheme? This ghost has been haunting them since March 1940. What standard of truth is this? Every Congress leader, heading (*sic*) with Mr. Gandhi has discussed, issued statements and written volumes about Pakistan. Babu Rajendra Prasad has actually issued a pamphlet with regard to the Pakistan scheme giving his views. And he says it was never discussed by the Working Committee, because Mr. Jinnah never referred it to them ! I say to Babu Rajendra Prasad, ask your Working Committee to discuss it if they have not. I say, not only to discuss it but apply your mind to it honestly, without prejudice and without silly sentiments, if there is any political wisdom or statesmanship still left in the Congress leadership." Quite, obviously, tempers were frayed, not a happy prolegomena to understanding, and for this grave default, Gandhi must bear his share, which is necessarily a very large share, of responsibility.[8]

The vacillation and ineffectiveness of the Congress leadership, under Gandhi's protective wing, in this period was due not merely to the communal tangle which had become a prime national problem, but also to the social outlook which prevailed among them. While village reconstruction, hand-spinning and allied crafts have surely a great contribution still to make in Indian economy, the social philosophy which Gandhi propagated could not but cater to reaction, in spite of certain sublimites comprised therein. In 1934, for example, Gandhi had assured a deputation of landlords that if their property

rights were attacked he would fight on their side. "The *Ram Rajya* of my dreams", he said, with characteristic incongruity, "ensures the rights alike of prince and pauper." The pauper was to be there, in *Ram Rajya,* presumably in order that the prince might exercise his pity and so earn a niche in heaven. None could doubt Gandhi's deep concern for the poor and the lowly, but he thought that the prerogatives of the prosperous and the deprivations of the disinherited could, with minor adjustments, co-exist. No call came from him then, to the class-conscious proletarian and his peasant allies, phenomena thrown up inevitably by the social process, and the national movement was, to that grave extent, cribbed and confined. It is not surprising that in January 1940, he wrote in *Harijan*: "It has been suggested to me by a Congressman wielding great influence that as soon as I declared civil disobedience, I would find a staggering response this time. The whole labour world and the kisans in many parts of India will, he assures me, declare a simultaneous strike. I told him that if that happened I should be most embarrassed and all my plans would be upset .....I hope I am not expected knowingly to undertake a fight that must end in anarchy and red ruin." And so it came about that in the evil days of the imperialist war, the self-denying ordinance which Gandhi had imposed on himself proved the undoing of our mass forces and the people heard no call from him, whose voice they had learnt to heed, to hurl themselves against the fenced cities and the high towers of profit and power.[9]

Tendulkar frankly notes that by October 1941 the general enthusiasm over the Individual Satyagraha campaign was on the decline, and few of the released prisoners had courted re-arrest as Gandhi had expected them to do. Events, however, were moving on, and in 1941 the two biggest and most decisive events of World War II took place—Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union (June) and Japan's full-dress entry into the War (December). World fascist strategy, set forth respectively in "Mein Kampf" and the Tanaka Memorial, was spreading out, as it were, its eastern and western pincers in the battle for India. The climax of Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, coinciding with the climax of the Japanese-fascist advance in Asia, seemed to emphasise the common interests of the Soviet, Chinese and Indian peoples. In an interview in May 1942, Gandhi

said: "My sympathies are undoubtedly in favour of China and Russia. I used to say that my moral support was entirely with Britain. I am very sorry to have to confess that today my mind refuses to give that moral support. British behaviour towards India has filled me with great pain.....And therefore, though I do not wish any humiliation to Britain and therefore no defeat, my mind refuses to give her any moral support."[10]

In December 1941, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and other leaders were released. Progressive elements in Britain were putting forward two basic demands—a Second Front in Europe to relieve pressure on the Soviets, and settlement with India. The Second Front, which Molotov was promised should be opened before the end of 1942, was actually deferred till as late as June 1944. In the case of the demand for settlement with India, reaction was in an even stronger position and only offered from time to time trumpery proposals that patriotic India could not bring herself to accept.

India's leaders, however, did not fail to recognise that the world alignment of forces had changed in 1941. On December 8, Nehru said to a Lucknow press conference : "I think that in the grouping that exists, there is no doubt that progressive forces of the world are aligned with the group represented by Russia, China, America and England." The Congress Working Committee, meeting at Bardoli towards the end of December noted: "While there has been no change in Britain's policy towards India, the Working Committee must nevertheless take into consideration the new world situation that has arisen by the development of the war into a world conflict and its approach to India. The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably lie with the people who are the subjects of aggression and who are fighting for their freedom." It was felt thus, that the path was again being cleared for negotiations that the Government, now in a tightening corner, might wish to initiate. The earlier drama of a break between the Working Committee and Gandhi, still theoretically ploughing a lonely furrow of complete non-violence, now came to be re enacted. Gandhi asked to be relieved of the responsibility of leadership, which for the individual satyagraha phase he had assumed, and his wish was promptly complied with. The Congress, uninhibited by the dogma of non-violence, could discuss tangibly terms of a settlement with Britain which had now, willynilly, to make some

advances. The British debacle in Burma had brought matters to a crisis. Marshal and Madame Chiang-kai-shek came to India in February 1942, met and talked for hours with Gandhi and other leaders and appealed to Britain and India to join hands together for conducting the war. Rangoon fell to the Japanese on March 7, 1942, and in some consternation the Churchill Government sent out to India Sir Stafford Cripps with a plan of settlement. The U.S.A. took a hand also in the negotiations, and Col. Johnson, President Roosevelt's special representative, met both parties in an effort to "iron out the differences."

Though Gandhi had for the time being withdrawn from the leadership, so that the Congress might offer co-operation in the war effort if power was transferred, his advice was always sought and tirelessly given to the leaders who conducted the formal negotiations. Even in mid-January, at the Wardha meeting of the AICC, he had said: "Some Congressmen are sorry because I have relinquished the leadership of the Congress. You have not lost me. You would lose me, only if I ceased to be loyal to the Congress, *only if I ceased to be a practical man.* It is not at Bardoli that I left the Congress. I did so, seven years ago, at Bombay, and I did so in order to be able to render greater service to the country and the Congress." Earlier in the same speech he said : "I have said for years and I say now that not Rajaji but Jawaharlal will be my successor. He says that he does not understand my language, and that he speaks a language foreign to me. This may or may not be true. But language is no bar to a union of hearts. And I know this, when I am gone he will speak my language."[11] There is about such words an almost uncanny practicability, and appearances notwithstanding, Gandhi was still, from his retreat, the decisive leader of the Congress, as keen as any of his colleagues on extracting from Britain the price of India's support in the war, the price which could only be what he conceived as the substance of independence, the price which he felt could be secured without an overturning of the social balance in India. It was with Gandhi, therefore, that Cripps had his most crucial conversation, and it was Gandhi again, who, making up his mind about Cripps' offer being unacceptable, characterised it memorably as "a post-dated cheque on a failing bank."

It was clear, as Cripps came and went, that the British were not ready to accede to India's minimum demands. As a matter of fact, the British Government's gesture of conciliation with India had been made with serious mental reservations. Britain's prestige had sunk very low and there was a feeling abroad that she was prejudicing the allied war effort by meeting every Indian demand with blank refusal. It was to save face, so to say, that the Cripps mission came to India, and there was relief and rejoicing in New Delhi and at Whitehall, strongholds both of imperialist die-hardism, when the mission failed and the blame for it could be placed on Congress "extremists" and Gandhi's pacifism. The Cripps episode was deliberately manoeuvred and is a classic illustration of Lenin's warning that "there is always a way out" for the ruling classs in a crisis unless the people manage to seal it up. Indian leaders only saw that Churchill, constrained to send Cripps, must have been in a tight corner, but hardly realised that ways and means for escape were still open to the imperialist.

Four-fifths of the draft declaration that Cripps brought with him dealt with the future. It contained a promise, hedged round with many qualifications, of Dominion Status with the right of secession if India chose to exercise it, after the war was over. It envisaged a cumbrous "constitution-making body" consisting of one-tenth the number of an Electoral college of 1585 members, which in turn would be elected by 11 per cent of the population of the provinces enfranchised by the Government of India Act of 1935. The Princes were given the option to "appoint" about 500 nominees to the Electoral College. Cripps spoke, it appears, with many voices. To Congress he said that a constitution could be framed as the basis for a treaty with Britain, and India could remain inside or quit the British Commonwealth as she thought fit ; to the Muslim League he said that provinces with a Muslim majority could separately elect their own constitution-making bodies and have a separate treaty with the British Government ; to the Princes he said that if they did not like the new constitution Britain would see that their treaty rights were not impaired ; and to racial and religious minorities he gave the assurance that Britain would make sure that "justice" was done to them. He met different groups separately ;

Britain wanted, it was clear, not so much to quit India as to divide her people and continue her domination.

Churchill, Cripps's boss, was *bete noir* to Indian nationalism; only six months ago he had made the averment that the so-called Atlantic Charter did not apply to India. Cripps had a different reputation but he did Churchill's bidding to perfection. His Draft Declaration was put before the Indian leaders to be approved or rejected in its entirety. There could be only one answer in the mood of those days, for India was sick of promises for the future.

This episode is important in the evolution of Gandhi's policies, for as Gandhi returned, inevitably, after Cripps had left, to a new anti-war, anti-British mass movement, he was a very different man from what he was in the individual satyagraha period. Cripps had been certified to him by Jawaharlal himself as a genuine radical; besides, he was a fruitarian, even more than the vegetarian, a rare breed anywhere, and as such, a man very much after Gandhi's heart. And yet he pressed on India political proposals that were fundamentally piffle. "Why did you come if this is what you have to offer?", Gandhi told him. "I would advise you to take the first plane home". After the failure of the mission, he wrote to well-meaning British friends: "Sir Stafford has come and gone. How nice it would have been if he had not come with that dismal mission. I talked to him frankly as a friend, if for nothing else for Andrews' sake. I told him that I was speaking to him with Andrews' spirit as my witness. I made suggestions but all to no avail.....The whole thing has left a bad taste in the mouth." And so by April 1942, Gandhi had already evolved the demand that "the British should leave India now in an orderly manner", and in June he told an American journalist: "I am not interested in independence after the war. I want independence now. That will help Britain win the war." In a short while this was to develop into a call to his people for a struggle which, "short and swift", would be an "open rebellion", in which all patriots, including the soldiery, would be called to join. He was faced, he said, with "a drastic disease, requiring a drastic remedy."[12]

Towards the end of April, 1942, the A.I.C.C. met at Allahabad, and adopted a resolution, based on a draft sent by Gandhi but probably Nehru's composition, which deserves to

be quoted, at least in part. "The Congress", it said, "repudiates the idea that freedom can come through interference or invasion by any foreign nation, whatever the pretensions of that nation may be. In case an invasion takes place it must be resisted. Such resistance can only take the form of non-violent non-co-operation as the British Government has prevented the organisation of national defence by the people in any other way. The Committee would therefore expect the people of India to offer complete non-co-operation to the invading forces and not to render any assistance to them. We may not bend the knee to the aggressor nor obey any of his orders. We may not look to him for favours nor fall to his bribes. If he wishes to take possession of our houses and fields we must refuse to give them up even if we have to die in the effort to resist them." It recalls the 1920-21 days, but with a new urgency unseen in Gandhi before. Jawaharlal, deeply troubled by the fascist advance, had spoken at a press conference on April 12, 1942, of organising independent resistance to the Japanese—"it may be", he said, "we would have to take up guerrilla warfare", which would be "our own war effort on the basis of a free and independent India". Gandhi mildly disapproved the idea of guerrilla warfare—"it will be a nine days' wonder; it is foreign to the Indian soil"—and insisted on non-violent non-co operation which, at the AICC, Nehru also agreed to. But Gandhi spoke of non-violence also for the first time in a new way. "I have decided", he said in late May, "that even at certain risks, which are obviously involved, I must ask the people to resist the slavery.....There is ordered anarchy all around and about us. I am sure that the anarchy that may result, because of the British withdrawal or their refusal to listen to us and our decision to defy their authority, will in no way be worse than the present anarchy. After all, those who are unarmed cannot produce a frightful amount of violence or anarchy, and I have a faith that out of that anarchy may arise pure non-violence. But to be a passive witness of the terrible violence that is going on, of the terrible anarchy that is going on in the name of resisting a possible foreign aggression, is a thing I can't stand. It is a thing that would make me ashamed of my *ahimsa*."[13]

It was about this time that Gandhi began to popularise his great slogan : "*Quit India* !" Early in May, 1942, he said

in the course of an interview : "From the frustration of every effort made to bring about unity by me among others, has arisen this logical step for me that not until British power is wholly withdrawn from India, can there be any real unity, because all parties will be looking to the foreign power..... Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that real heart unity, genuine unity, is almost an impossibility unless British power is withdrawn and no other power takes its place." That imperialism nursed and nurtured communal antagonism, that it throve on the historic policy of 'divide and rule' and made subtle refinements of it, is undoubted. But as noted often before, communal distempers nearly vanished like mist before sunrise when mass movements, related to the people's living conditions, were courageously launched, and Gandhi had been veering away from such movements. The responsibility for the communal deadlock was no doubt to an extent imperialism's, but Gandhi and the national leadership must also bear a good part of it.

This was, also, perhaps vaguely, Gandhi's own realisation, and when an American journalist asked him what free India meant "if, as Jinnah said, Muslims will not accept Hindu rule", his answer was characteristic : "I have not asked the British to hand over India to the Congress or to Hindus. Let them entrust India to God, or in modern parlance, to anarchy. Then, all parties will fight one another like dogs, or will, when real responsibility faces them, come to a reasonable agreement. I shall expect non-violence to rise out of that chaos."[14]

The new note of urgency and of passion in his speech and writing reveals in Gandhi more of the patriot than of the saint, and all honour to him on that account. There was in his urgency more than a hint of action which, in that troubled period when Fascism's fangs menaced freedom, needed very careful thought. Nehru records the dilemma of the time in words that can be quoted in extenso. "Some of us", wrote Nehru, "disturbed and upset by this new development, for action was futile unless it was effective action, and any such effective action must necessarily come in the way of war effort at a time when India herself stood in peril of invasion. Gandhiji's general approach also seemed to ignore important international considerations and appeared to be based on a narrow view of nationalism. During the three years of war

we had deliberately followed a policy of non-embarrassment, and such action as we had indulged in had been in the nature of symbolic protest.....We could not repeat that, and if we did something else it had to be of a different kind and on a more effective scale. Was this not bound to interfere with war in India's borders and encourage the enemy ?

"There were difficulties, and we discussed them at length with Gandhiji, without converting each other.....His subsequent writings underwent a change, and he himself emphasised these international considerations and looked at India's problems in a wider perspective. But his fundamental attitude remained : his objection to a passive submission to British autocratic and repressive policy in India and his intense desire to do something to challenge this. Submission then, according to him, meant that India would be broken in spirit, and whatever shape the war might take, whatever its end might be, her people would act in a servile way and their freedom would not be achieved for a long time.....

"In India it was better to convert the sullen passivity of the people into a spirit of non-submission and resistance.....

".....If it was to be conflict, howsoever much it might be justified on moral or other grounds, there could be no doubt that it would tend greatly to interfere with the war effort in India at a time when the danger of invasion was considerable. There was no getting away from that fact. And yet, oddly enough, it was that very danger that had brought this crisis in our minds. For we could not remain idle spectators of it and see our country mismanaged and ruined by people whom we considered incompetent and wholly incapable of shouldering the burden of a people's resistance which the occasion demanded. All our pent-up passion and energy sought some outlet, some way of action.

"Gandhiji was getting on in years, he was in the seventies, and a long life of ceaseless activity, of hard toil, both physical and mental, had enfeebled his body. But he was still vigorous enough, and he felt that all his life-work would be in vain if he submitted to circumstances then and took no action to vindicate what he prized most. His love of freedom for India and all other exploited nations overcame even his strong adherence to non-violence.....So he himself sponsored a Congress resolution which declared that the primary

tion of the provisional government of free India would be to throw all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against aggression and co-operate fully with the United Nations in the defence of India with all the armed as well as other forces at her command. It was no easy matter for him to commit himself in this way, but he swallowed the bitter pill, so overpowering was his desire that some settlement should be arrived at to enable India to resist the aggressor as a free nation."[15]

The people's detestation of an imperialism, proved in war's crucible not only callous but also egregiously inept, now soared high as food prices rose; there was danger of interruption of supplies, and distress was widespread. Gandhi had his finger on their pulse, and as he wrote his series of *Harijan* articles, the sullen passivity of the country seemed to rise to a pitch of excitement and expectation. Even those like Nehru who were not unaware that a real struggle at that juncture involved serious risk, felt there was no other way but the "short and swift" struggle that the master with his message of "Do or Die" now promised, the struggle which infusing into India the glow of freedom's exhilaration would bring her effectively into the camp of anti-fascism. "It was better", felt Nehru, "to jump into the uncharted seas of action and do something rather than be the tame objects of a malign fate. It was not a politician's approach but that of a people desperate and reckless of consequences." The daily torture of the mind was too heavy a price to pay, and the dilemma which struggle posed called for drastic solution.[16]

As the temper of the people rose, so did that of the Government also. And so there came about what is sometimes called the "August Revolution" which showed the grandeur of our people's spirit and also its weakness. To Gandhi's role in that "revolution" we shall now turn our attention.

Notes to Chapter IX

[1] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Towards Freedom", pp. 318-19.

[2] E. M. S. Namboodiripad, "Gandhi—Saint or Politician ?" in "New Age" (February, 1955); cf. D. G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. V *passim*; Jawaharlal Nehru "The Discovery of India", pp. 449-52.

[3] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* pp. 349, 355, 384.

[4] D. N. Pritt, "Choose Your Freedom", p. 40

[5] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* pp. 395-97 ; Namboodiripad *op. cit.*

[6] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 406, Vol. Vi pp. 6, 12, 16.

[7] *Ibid.* p. 6 ; W. C. Smith, "Modern Islam in India", pp. 251-53.

[8] "Recent Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah", ed. J. Ahmed, (1942), pp. 149-51, 153, 218, 251 ; M. Noman, "Muslim India", p. 427 ; B. R. Ambedkar, "The Partition of India", p. 268 ; V. D. Savarkar, Presidential Address, Hindu Mahasabha (Calcutta, December 1939).

[9] In connection with this point there is a valuable discussion in R. P. Dutt, "India Today", pp. 509-28.

[10] Horace Alexander, "India Since Cripps" (1944), p. 26 ; Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 106.

[11] *Ibid.* p. 52.

[12] *Ibid.* pp. 89, 93, 99, 117.

[13] *Ibid.* pp. 113-14 ; Mukerjee, "India Struggles for Freedom", p. 191, and references therein. "The original idea of asking the British to go", Gandhi said to Louis Fischer in June 1942, "burst upon me suddenly. It was the Cripps fiasco that inspired the idea."

[14] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 132.

[15] Nehru, "The Discovery of India", pp 480-85.

[16] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER X

The Struggle of '42 and its Aftermath

"I have waited long, and I can wait no longer. It is a terrible tragedy that forty crores of people should have no say in this war. If we have the freedom to play our part, we can arrest the march of Japan and save China." These were Gandhi's words to an American journalist who had come to see him in mid-June 1942. This impatience of a man who had sedulously disciplined himself is, indeed, a notable feature in Gandhi after the Cripps fiasco. "Independence here and now" was his stand, for India's continued emasculation could no longer on any count be justified. "The allies have no moral cause", he said, "for which they are fighting, so long as they are carrying this double sin on their shoulders, the sin of India's subjection and the subjection of the Negroes and African races." In a number of *Harijan* articles, Gandhi explained that he wanted, as the best friend of the British people and the allied cause, to rid them of that moral burden. The freedom of India was to be not only in India's interest but also of Britain's. A fire, he said, was raging in him, and would be quenched only with freedom won by a non-violent battle.[1]

For the first time in his life, Gandhi's envisagement of a mass movement was not preponderantly affected by his fixation about non-violence. He thought even, perhaps rather dimly, in terms of spontaneous rising of the people, up against not Government alone but also the landlords and capitalists. As early as June 1942 he gave several important interviews to Louis Fischer, in the course of which he drew a picture of his contemplated civil disobedience movement. "In the villages", Gandhi explained, "peasants will stop paying taxes.....But refusal to pay it will give the peasants courage to think that they are capable of independent action. Their next step will be to seize the land."

This is language which Gandhi had never used before, and

when Fischer, in surprise, asked, "With violence ?", the reply was : "There may be violence, but then again landlords may co-operate". Twitted for his optimism, Gandhi joked : "they might co-operate by fleeing". Fischer countered by suggesting that peasants might organise "violent resistance", and Gandhi made, for him, the stupendous answer: "There may be fifteen days of chaos, but I think we would soon bring that under control." On August 8, by which time much water had flown under bridges, he said in answer to a question by an Associated Press interviewer : "You are very right when you say that for a swift ending (of the struggle) a general strike is necessary. It is not outside my contemplation, but seeing that I shall take every step in terms of my oft-repeated declaration that mass struggle is not contemplated in any inimical spirit, but in the friendliest spirit, I shall move with utmost caution. *And if a general strike becomes a dire necessity, I shall not flinch.*"[2] (Italics added)

It would be wrong, however, as Namboodiripad pointed out in his articles on Gandhi, that the Mahatma had really visualised a revolutionary struggle. If he had done so, certain preparations would surely have been called for. India's working class and peasantry, howsoever inadequate their organisation, were by no means dumb wards of their betters. It was a big advance for the apostle of non-violence, of course, to be ready to utilise and therefore, by implication, to approve "fifteen days of chaos" wrought by the peasantry for purposes of a political settlement. But Gandhi had so much sheer practical sense that it is impossible to think of him as having envisaged a truly revolutionary struggle which went against his grain and was bound, besides, to defeat whatever limitations he might seek to put on it.

One is not surprised, therefore, to note that in his great speech before the All India Congress Committee, where Gandhi gave the slogan of "Do or Die", there was not a word addressed specifically to the workers or to the peasants. He categorised his appeal to special interests—to journalists, to the princes, to government servants, even to soldiers, and to the students, telling them separately what they should do to help the struggle. No particular role was allotted to the workers and the peasants, and though they formed the overwhelming majority of the people they were expected simply to line up

in the manner directed by their superiors. The priority given to journalists in Gandhi's order of appeal is perhaps not entirely accidental; the Mahatma, with all his great courage and occasional sublimity, had throughout his life a shrewd eye to publicity of whatever he thought or did.

It has been rightly argued, in answer to the thesis that in August 1942 Gandhi really intended a revolutionary fight, that the omission of workers and peasants from his picture at the AICC was by no means casual. A "draft of instructions" had been, it appears, prepared by Gandhi for the Working Committee. The draft called for a day of *hartal*, like the one in 1920 with which non-co-operation was first inaugurated, but in case the *hartal* went beyond bounds, it laid down that "on the day of the *hartal* no processions should be taken out, nor meetings held in the cities, and all people should observe a twentyfour-hour fast and offer prayers." Meetings and processions were allowed only in villages "where there is no fear of violence or disturbance". Obviously, the 1942 movement, as envisaged by Gandhi, was to bear all the usual marks of his patent, and every precaution was counselled against militant demonstrations and mass action.

In spite of the June idea of "fifteen days of chaos", the draft of instructions also included abundant safeguards against the possible outbreak of anti-landlord action by the peasantry. Action was to be, under orders, restricted to action against Government alone. "Where the zamindari system prevails, the zamindars pay the tax to the government and the ryot to the zamindar. In such cases, if the zamindar makes common cause with the ryot, his portion of the revenue, which may be settled by mutual agreement, should be given to him. But if a zamindar wants to side with the government, no tax should be paid to him. This will, in the immediate present, spell ruin to the ryot. Therefore, only those who are prepared to face utter ruin should refuse payment of land revenue".[3]

Even so, the speech of Gandhi before the All India Congress Committee on August 8, 1942, is a classic of its kind. He congratulated the three Communist members for their courage in pressing their amendment whose main burden was Hindu-Muslim unity which would make the demand for a national movement irresistible. He recalled his constant endeavour for a "heart unity" between Hindus and Muslims,

and insisted that unity would only come in "the effort to be free from the shackles of this empire". He added : "If Pakistan after all is to be a portion of India, what objection can there be for Musalmans against joining this struggle for India's freedom ? The Hindus and Musalmans must, therefore, unite in the first instance on the issue of fighting for freedom. Jinnah Sahib thinks the war will last long. I do not agree with him. If the war goes on for six months more, how shall we be able to save China ?"

Gandhi's anticipation of the length and trend of the war proved inaccurate, but there is no doubt the situation for the Allies was very tense. That was exactly why Jawaharlal had felt, much more strongly than did Gandhi, the risks involved in a struggle at that juncture, howsoever pig headed and perverse the British Government. "He (Nehru) fought against my position", Gandhi has left on record, "with a passion which I have no words to describe. But the logic of facts overwhelmed him." Nehru's own reading was that events were not waiting for Congress resolutions, and pushed forward by Gandhi's utterances they were "moving onward with their own momentum". Right or wrong, Gandhi had crystallised the prevailing mood of the people : "there was a desperateness in it, an emotional urge which gave second place to logic and reason or a calm consideration of the consequences of action." Almost preternaturally self possessed, Gandhi seems to be, for a while in this period, in a mood of very near frenzy —the saint swearing perennially by non-violence and the politician with a constant eye on the chances of settlement had both taken a back seat, and the patriot's passion blazed forth. The mood passed before long, but for a time it lit up the Indian scene.

"I want freedom immediately", he said in the speech above referred to, "this very night, before dawn, if it can be had. Freedom cannot now wait for the achievement of communal unity..... Fraud and untruth today are stalking the world. I cannot be a helpless witness to such a situation. I have travelled all over India as perhaps nobody in the present age has. The voiceless millions of the land saw in me their friend and representative, and I identified myself with them to an extent it was possible for a human being to do. I saw trust in their eyes, which I now want to turn to good account

in fighting this empire upheld on untruth and violence. However gigantic the preparations that the empire has made we must get out of its clutches.....*Cou may take it from me that I am not going to strike a bargain with the Viceroy for ministries and the like. I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom* Here is a *mantra*, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The *mantra* is : 'Do or Die'. *We shall either see free India or die in the attempt ;* we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery..... Where shall I go and where shall I take the forty crores of India ? How is this vast mass of humanity to be aflame in the cause of world deliverance, unless and until it has touched and felt freedom ? Today, they have no touch of life left. It has been crushed out of them. If lustre is to be put into their eyes, freedom has to come not tomorrow but today. I have, therefore, pledged the Congress, and the Congress has pledged herself that she will do or die." (Italics added)

It was a magnificent statement, but lest it be thought, in the world's sense of the word, revolutionary, it should be recalled that Gandhi had imposed some typical inhibitions. "Nothing", he adjured, "should be done secretly. This is an open rebellion. In this struggle secrecy is a sin. A free man would not engage in a secret movement. It is likely that when you gain freedom, you will have a C.I.D. of your own, in spite of my advice to the contrary. But in the present struggle, we have to work openly and to receive bullets on our chests, without taking to heels."[5]

The famous Working Committee resolution of July 14 had stated *inter alia* : "The Congress is anxious to avoid the experience of Malaya, Singapore and Burma, and desires to build up resistance to any aggression or invasion of India by the Japanese or any foreign power. The Congress would change the present ill-will in the country against Britain and make India a willing partner in a joint enterprise for securing freedom for the nations and peoples of the world and in the trials and tribulations which accompany it, and this is only possible if India feels the glow of freedom." Should its appeal fail, however, the Committee warned, there would be nothing left but recourse to a non-violent struggle under Gandhi's leader-

ship. This struggle was sanctioned by the All India Congress Committee on August 8, 1942.

The "Quit India" resolution, as it has come to be known, deserves to be recalled, for though imperialism mendaciously described it as pro-fascist and though, in its operation, with the the Congress leadership stowed securely away in jail, for a time it affected prejudicially the war effort of the Allies, the main part of it was notable for its flaming anti-fascism, its declaration of sympathy with the cause of the United Nations, the pledge to organise both armed and non-violent resistance to aggression, and of course also, the *sine qua non* for such resistance, the formation of a national Government. It touched off a memorable movement which the provocations of a wooden administration only helped to intensify. But on the eve of the meeting which adopted the resolution, Gandhi said : "I have definitely contemplated an interval between the passing of the resolution and the starting of the struggle. A letter will certainly go to the Viceroy, not as an ultimatum, but an earnest pleading for avoiding of conflict. If there is a favourable response, then my letter can be the basis for negotiation." This readiness for a settlement was borne out also by the contents of the letter which Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy from the Aga Khan Palace in Poona where he was kept in detention. Government, however, had crossed the Rubicon, and Gandhi was given curtly to understand that there was no common ground for discussion.[6]

In spite, thus, of certain indications that Gandhi intended the 1942 movement to be a really revolutionary struggle, unencumbered by impracticable quasi-ethical imperatives, it soon began to be clear that, as on previous occasions, the idea had been to put as much pressure as possible on Government in order to facilitate a settlement. It is true, of course, that in 1942 Gandhi was, as far as can be ascertained, far less anxious than at any previous period to prevent militant mass action on the part of the people. It is true also that he did not practise his usual post-haste condemnation of deviation by the people from strict rules of *ahimsa* which he had insisted upon previously. Instead of denouncing 'mob violence' and confessing 'Himalayan blunders', he now took the more rational attitude that 'mob violence', if it occurred, was the natural reaction to the 'leonine violence' perpetrated by the Government against

the people. Even so, it appears that once Gandhi's anticipation of a 'short and swift' movement compelling Government to a compromise proved wrong, he resumed the accustomed threads of his political strategy. He had sought to pave the way for the success of his 'short and swift' struggle by appeals to Marshal Chiang Kai-shek and President Roosevelt and by copious interviews explaining his stand with international press correspondents; it was surely with his accord that Maulana Azad, winding up the AICC meeting, announced that he was "addressing the United Nations on the Congress demand and would strive till the last minute to reach a settlement." But the calculations so made went wrong, and imperialism, far yet from its last ditch, cruelly suppressed the heroic upsurge, for the leaders were nearly all in jail, and either underrating imperialism's resources or disliking its implications, had built no fighting organisation of the people. "By the end of September", the Mahatma's chief biographer writes, "the government had apparently succeeded in crushing both the non-violent and the violent attempts to compel them to quit India." It was a sad end to a luminous chapter in Gandhi's life and India's history.

In a letter to the Viceroy, dated September 23, 1942, Gandhi wrote from detention : ".....In spite of all that has been said to the contrary, I claim that the Congress policy still remains unequivocally non-violent. The wholesale arrest of the Congress leaders seems to have made the people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control. I feel that the Government, not the Congress, are responsible for the destruction that has taken place. The only right course for the Government seems to me to be to release the Congress leaders, withdraw all repressive measures and explore ways and means of conciliation. Surely the Government have ample resources to deal with any overt act of violence. Repression can only breed discontent and bitterness." This letter was, significantly, held back when Government published, on the eve of Gandhi's fast on February 9, 1943, the correspondence that had passed since August between him and the Viceroy. Obviously, Gandhi was holding forth the olive branch and the Viceroy was repelling it. In a letter dated Janury 19, 1943, disowning responsibility for the disturbances which Government was trying frantically to foist upon him, Gandhi wrote : "(1) If you want me

to act singly, convince me that I was wrong and I will make ample amends. (2) If you want me to make any proposal on behalf of the Congress, you should put me among the Congress Working Committee members. I do plead with you to make up your mind to end the impasse."

Every time Gandhi got 'No' for an answer. Indeed, Government, in possession then of the political initiative, wanted the impasse. Imperialist bureaucrats could not tolerate free India fighting fascism with the glow of freedom in her heart. They could only justify their conduct before the United Nations by dubbing Congress pro-Axis, by provoking our people into fury, and ruthlessly suppressing them. They, therefore, blacked out the truth about India. They knew very well that Congress was anti fascist, that the movement, envisaged but not launched, was planned to be non-violent, that, as Maulana Azad wrote later to the Viceroy : "The AICC, at no time, contemplated such a campaign (sabotage), never issued instructions (for it), secret or other." Naturally, they pretended not to know it at all. By the most extreme provocation, they incited our people to desperate upsurge in certain areas and so secured for Churchill, their super-boss at the time, the chance in November 1942, to shout, in defiance of all high sounding 'War Aims' declarations, that he had "not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."

The cup of Gandhi's patience was full, when he decided to go on a fast for 21 days from February 9, 1943, "a fast according to capacity". It was a characteristic protest against the Government's "leonine violence" inevitably driving our people to frenzy, and against the refusal either to set him free or to allow him to meet members of the Congress Working Committee to review the political situation in view of all that had happened. He told the Viceroy that his heart bled for the privations of India's millions on account of a scarcity—which soon took the form, especially in Bengal, of a horrible famine—that "might have been mitigated, if not altogether prevented, had there been a *bona fide* National Government." Lord Linlithgow's answer to the announcement was couched in such terms that even Gandhi nearly lost his temper. "You have described the step", wrote Gandhi, "as an attempt 'to find an easy way out'. That you, as a friend, can impute such a base and cowardly motive to me passes comprehension. You have also

described it as 'a form of political blackmail'. Despite your description it is on my part an appeal to the Highest Tribunal for justice which I have failed to secure from you. Posterity will judge between you as representative of an all-powerful Government and me as an humble man who has tried to serve his country and humanity through it."[7]

The country was thrown suddenly into a state of the most excruciating perturbation. There was none in the country so poor in spirit as to think well of a callous bureaucracy that had drowned in blood and tears the brave, blind, spontaneous upsurge of our patriots; that had failed, egregiously, in offering effective protection to the people when Japanese bombs fell on Chittagong, Noakhali, Calcutta, and various places in Assam; that had bungled, with criminal and insolent inefficiency, the problem of food supplies and had inducted dread famine into our fair land. To the prevailing frustration was added now the acutest anxiety, for the 74-year-old father of the country, its leader and mentor, had undertaken, at Government provocation, a 21-day fast. Out of the anxiety, however, there emerged a country-wide agitation for his release. Though the Muslim League did not officially join the agitation—its estrangement from the Congress had gone too deep for that—there was no doubt about Leaguers, individually, being keen on saving the great man's life. A non-party conference, attended by representatives of almost every section of opinion—including the Lord Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan of India whom Government had refused permission to see the Mahatma in jail—met at Delhi and urged on Government the desirability, in the interests of Indo-British friendship, of Gandhi's immediate release. Both Linlithgow and Churchill, however, remained adamant. Three Indian members of the Viceroy's Executive Council resigned in protest, but little impression was made on a callous administration still confident of its power of riding roughshod over Indian feeling.

With his customary reserves of strength, Gandhi survived the ordeal of the long fast, and while the country, though greatly relieved, was disappointed that they were still unable to bring him out of jail, a campaign now began for the release of the Congress leaders and for the opening of negotiations for a settlement with Government. In March 1943,

a number of non-Congress leaders had a meeting at Bombay, and issued a statement in which it was said :

"The recent talks which some of us have had with Gandhiji lead us to believe that a move for reconciliation at the present juncture will bear fruit. It is our conviction that if Gandhiji is set at liberty, he will do his best to give guidance and assistance in the solution of the internal deadlock and that there need not be any fear that there would be any danger for the successful prosecution of the war".[8]

It was by no means unlike Gandhi to have realised that a certain retracing of steps was indicated by the realities of the changing situation. It is clear that he had changed his stand from that taken on August 8, 1942; the 'Quit India' struggle, with its slogan of 'Do or Die' was no longer, in his view, relevant to the circumstances. He was feeling his way now, not only towards negotiations with Government but also towards talks with the Muslim League with a view to an understanding. C. Rajagopalachari, who had made without success an essay towards *rapprochement* with Jinnah, moved again into the limelight. He has left it on record that Gandhi had discussed with him and approved a formula for Congress-League settlement, which was later published in July 1944. From his detention, Gandhi made attempts to establish direct contact with Jinnah; the latter had proudly declared that Gandhi, if he wanted, could write to him direct, and the British Government would not dare prevent the correspondence. When, however, Gandhi, taking the cue, did write, the Government refused any facilities for such correspondence, and Jinnah, eating the words he had said before, took it lying down and found fresh reasons for pouring venom on Gandhi and the Congress! Government at this stage wanted from Gandhi no less than the pound of flesh; he must, in sackcloth and ashes, disavow and denounce the mass movement, but such act of contrition, in spite of Gandhi's eagerness for a solution of the deadlock, was too much to expect from the Mahatma.[9]

And so the *impasse* persisted, till May 1944, when Gandhi was released unconditionally. Government, however, took all grace out of the gesture by declaring that the decision was purely on medical grounds, for Gandhi had been seriously ill with malaria. This, of course, was not the whole story.

Bureaucrats who did not apparently mind Gandhi dying on their hands when he had gone on a 21-day fast in February 1943, could not possibly have become suddenly solicitous of his health. The movement in India for his release and for a solution of the political deadlock had grown; internationally, also, events were happening which compelled imperialist diehardism at least to make an appearance of relenting.

About a month after his release, Gandhi gave an interview to Stuart Gelder, corrsepondent of the *News Chronicle* (London), in which he said that there was no question of starting civil disobedience, that 1944 was not 1942, and that though he did not have the authority to withdraw the August resolution, its operative part sanctioning non-violent struggle might be deemed to have lapsed. Very definitely, he was holding forth the olive branch to Government. The proposals embodied, he said, "my individual effort to end the present deadlock. They are more addressed to the powers that be than to the people." He was ready to be "satisfied with a national Government in full control of the civil administration; it was not so in 1942."

While this attitude showed Gandhi's realism, it dismayed many to whom his ringing words in the post-Cripps phase of 1942 were still a summons to struggle. On July 14, 1944, Gandhi made before pressmen a statement which, in this connection, deserves to be quoted in extenso. "I have received," he said, "bitter criticism of my views, expressed in the Gelder interview. Some of the correspondents say that under the influence of moderates and moneyed men I have betrayed the cause of the country.

"I do not want to sail under false colours. The country as well as the Government should know me exactly as I am. I have never concealed the fact that I am a friend of everybody—moderates, moneyed men, Englishmen, Americans or any other, irrespective of caste or colour or persuasion. My non-co-operation is non-co-operation with evil, not with the evil-doer.....

"Some critics have suggested that by my present attitude I am lending moral weight to the allied cause. But they forget that my offer, such as it is, is subject to the condition that the Allies, in this case the British Government, should recognise full independence qualified during the pendency of the

war. I see, therefore, no conflict between the principle enumerated in the August resolution and what I have now suggested....."

In reply to a query, he added : "I may say that the favourable war situation had nothing to do with my proposal, if only for the simple reason that in the flush of approaching victory my proposal was not likely even to receive a hearing. But as a lover of peace, not merely in India but peace among all mankind, I could not but make a proposal for what it is worth. *After all, there is such a thing as world opinion, apart from the opinion of the authorities.*" (Italics added).

Gandhi proceeded to amplify the reasons for his stand, and explain his approach : "The difference between now and August 1942 is that at the time I had no knowledge of the response the people, both pro-Congress and anti-Congress, would make. Now I know the kind of response the people made. *Heroism, suffering and self-sacrifice of those who took part in this struggle are beyond praise; but weighed in the scale of truth and non-violence there are glaring defects in the popular demonstration.....* In the face of sabotage and the like, the rulers have as usual lost their heads and resorted to reprisals unheard of before. I write this under correction. Unless I am convinced to the contrary, I shall continue to believe that *the molehill of popular violence has been shown on behalf of Government to have been a mountain, and the Himalayan violence of the authorities has been generally defended as no more than necessary for the occasion. I must, therefore, refuse to judge popular action by the foot-rule of truth and non-violence unless I can apply the same measure for Government action.* This is one difference. The second difference is the terrible progressive starvation of the people .....I would be unworthy of my creed, if I failed to make use of all the resources of head and heart that God has vouchsafed to me for discovering a solution of the deadlock.....If the offer is accepted, I would be criminally guilty if I did not advise the Congress to accept it." (Italics added).[10]

This was the first occasion in his life when Gandhi had applied the adjective "Himalayan" not to the people's violence but Government's. Pride in the heroism of a sorely tried people had triumphed somewhat over the Mahatmic scruples. But he was reiterating that the sovereign specific for freedom

was non-violence : "Whatever may be true of other nations I have no doubt that India can come to her own fully by truth and non-violent means." It was less a philosophical statement than one based on political pragmatism ; his calculation, independently of purely moral considerations, was that an adequate amount of perssure on Government, aided by "world opinion" whose value he acknowledged, would achieve an acceptable settlement, and he was willing on his part to see the movement cease and wait for the compromise.

Gandhi, thus, made to the Viceroy the "concrete proposal" that he would advise the Congress Working Committee to offer "full co-operation in the war effort if a declaration of immediate Indian independence is made and a National Government responsible to the Central Assembly be formed, subject to the proviso that during the pendency of the war, military operations should continue as at present, but without involving any financial burden on India". Lord Wavell, however, stood on ceremony and described the proposal as "completely unacceptable". There was, he said, to be no change in the constitution during the war. Freedom without qualification could come after the war was over, but only on condition that the constitution to be framed was agreed to by "the main elements of India's national life" and necessary treaty arrangements were negotiated with the British Government. The insolent answer to a friendly gesture angered Gandhi. He said Britain would interpret as she wished the expression "main elements of India's national life" and exhibit, "as from a conjurer's bag", all kinds of parties whose agreement to the constitution was obligatory. It was the "four pillars" policy over again, and Gandhi, in exasperation, asked why "rivers of blood must flow" for an "empty victory" of the Allies if exploited races do not feel "the glow of it".[1]

In spite of every provocation, however, Gandhi was intent on a settlement if it could be at all achieved, and worked for it to the best of his powers. He did not hesitate to advise political workers who had gone 'underground" to evade arrest that they should "discover themselves", even as they were preparing to celebrate the second anniversary of "August 9". And well aware that Hindu-Muslim differences were a constant trump-card in imperialism's hands, he proceeded in September 1944 to have negotiations with Jinnah

on the basis of an amended version of the Rajagopalachari formula which had been decisively rejected by the Congress in 1942.

Both efforts failed. If a comparable attempt was made earlier to wean the majority of Muslims away from the separatist tendencies that were being sedulously cultivated, perhaps the partition of India would have been prevented. But it was too late to stem the tide that the Muslim League had, with tacit support from imperialism, let loose. Gandhi now had a good word to say about the League's Lahore resolution of 1940 ; uttered three years earlier, it might have made an emotional conquest of the Muslim mind, and the Jinnah spell, which had grown extraordinarily, might conceivably have been broken. That was not to be, however, and Gandhi's gestures were repelled by Jinnah, either of them arguing at cross purposes, or so it seemed to each other, and the masses sullen and puzzled about the course of the conversations. Gandhi's point of view can be well seen from one of his statements at the time : "We are not inhabiting a country full of deserts and waste lands. We are a densely populated country and I do not see the slightest chance for such redistribution (on the basis of community and culture). In that respect the Lahore resolution is quite sound—where there is an obvious Muslim majority, they should be allowed to constitute a separate state by themselves, and that has been fully conceded in the Rajaji formula or my formula. There is not much distinction between the two formulas. The right is conceded without the slightest reservation. But if it means utterly independent sovereignty, I hold it is an impossible proposition. That means war to the knife. The separation should be within ourselves and not separation in the face of the whole world." Matters had gone so far and tempers so frayed that even this approach, which in 1941-42 might have found a tremendous response, fell rather flat. In certain conversations in June-July 1946, Gandhi admitted that "Hindu separatism had played a part in creating the rift between Congress and the League", but recalled that he found Jinnah, during his eighteen days of talk with him in 1944, almost a "maniac", but with the fervour of a "prophet" who "looks upon himself as a saviour of Islam". About Pakistan, indeed, Jinnah had developed a fixation, but, it must be conceded,

there was some explanation for it and also some provocation. In that fixation, besides, he was assisted by imperialist machinations, particularly in war-time, and it was no mere chance that Gandhi, seeking to understand Jinnah's mind, and Jinnah bending with an effort a very stiff neck, felt repelled from each other. They announced, of course, when the talks failed, that they would meet again, but they never did.[12]

Though Gandhi was engaged at this time in a persistent effort for a negotiated settlement with Britain and though the Gelder interview definitely indicated a planned retreat from the 'Quit India' movement, he was still the symbol of the anti-British resurgence. So Subhas Chandra Bose, hailed by his admiring countrymen as "Netaji" on account of his leadership of the "Indian National Army" abroad and his spectacular scheme of bringing armed forces from outside the country to join hands with the resistance groups inside India, addressed Gandhi on the latter's birthday (October 2, 1944) as "Father of our nation" and invoked his "blessings and good wishes" for the success of the "holy war for India's liberation". More than two years earlier, Jawaharlal Nehru had called sharply to order those among our people whose hopes centred on "outside help" in our struggle for freedom; "any force that comes from outside", Nehru had said, "really comes as a dummy force under Japanese control." It was Nehru's influence, perhaps, which made Gandhi write explicitly in *Harijan* (June 21, 1942): "I have never attached the slightest importance and weight to the friendly professions of the Axis powers. If they come to India they will come not as deliverers but as sharers in the spoil. There can, therefore, be no question of my approval of Subhas Babu's policy." In late-1944, however, he did not make any comment, favourable or other, on the Netaji's programme and pronouncements. Perhaps his calculation was that since the August movement had been repressed and sporadic efforts at sabotage or the like were neither desirable nor effective, the only considerable pressure on the British Government in India came from happenings abroad, and Netaji's exciting moves, while not in themselves of decisive importance, would indirectly help his plans for a political settlement. It was perhaps this juxtaposition in Gandhi's mind which made him direct, on the eve of August 9, 1944, that political workers who had gone

underground should no longer elude the police or evade arrest, but that at the same time, in Bombay on that day, there should be symbolic defiance of police prohibition.

The British Government, in 1944, used Jinnah's recalcitrance as its principal pawn in the game to repel Gandhi's advances for a settlement. After the opening in June 1944 of the Second Front in Europe, the war situation also changed rapidly, and the Indian National Army, not very generously assisted by the Japanese, confronted the re-organised forces of the Allies, and in the end suffered defeat. The INA remained to our people a proud symbol, but as a fighting force it soon collapsed. To all outward appearance, die-hard imperialism had got its way against the forces arrayed for Indian freedom.

That however, was not really the case. The way the war was being fought and won had started, as it were, a tug-of-war inside the imperialist camp, a tug-of-war between the people and their rulers, in which the latter were sure, if slowly, to lose. As Gandhi himself had earlier put it, "after all there is such a thing as world opinion", and Indian discontent could not indefinitely be repressed. About the middle of June 1945, members of the Congress Working Committee were released, and a conference was held in Simla to discuss what was known as the Wavell Plan. Certain proposals were now offered, the most important being that except for the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief all members of the Executive Council would be Indians, the caste Hindus and Muslims being equally represented. The idea originally was that there would be parity of representation between Congress and the League; this, however, was changed by Wavell, after consultation with Secretary of State Amery, into equal representation for Hindus and Muslims. By this means, the Government of Lord Wavell, at a time when the slogan "Wavell is sincere" was being repeated by Congress leaders, placed a clever bait before the two organisations. The Congress could think that it could have all Hindu seats and one or two Muslim seats in the Council; the League felt that it would get all the Muslim seats, in which case no Congress Muslim could be nominated (as he could be, if it was just parity between Congress and the League). Both organisations failed to see through Wavell's game; Gandhi himself was politically out

witted. Government played its cards so cleverly that Congress and the League blamed one another, and British reaction, recovering from a tightening corner, immediately advertised to the world that Britain was willing to transfer power but Indian disagreement prevented it.

The country now was angry and astir, and if even at this stage the Congress leadership linked itself with the people's indomitable upsurge, Hindu-Muslim differences might conceivably have been eliminated in joint, popular struggles. But that was not to be. The League's chief enemy was Congress, and it concerned itself not so much with concrete plans for the achievement of freedom as with ensuring the partition of the country into Muslim and Hindu, freedom or no freedom. Not unaware that the British encouraged this disruptive trend, the Congress leadership yet pinned its hopes on British goodwill, and not only shied away from, but positively discouraged, the massive manifestations of our people's discontent. Over and over again, our common people had furnished proofs of their pluck, courage and intrepidity, their detestation of foreign rule and its symbols, their latent powers of *impromptu* organisation and mobility, and their disregard of danger to life or limb. If they were capable of so much without, as in 1942, organised leadership, what could have been their showing when a movement, properly prepared, was hurled against imperialism ?

Such leadership was withheld when, in November 1945, there took place, especially in Calcutta, stupendous demonstrations of protest against the trial of "Indian National Army" prisoners staged dramatically at the Red Fort in Delhi. The trial brought to light certain facts, which appeared to indicate that there was no clear ideological link between the INA and Japanese fascism, that their primary concern was the achievement of Indian freedom and during the pendency of the war the safe-guarding of Indian interests in South-East Asia, that there was considerable resentment of Japanese hesitation in rendering them really effective assistance, that the Japanese attempt to impose fatal restrictions even on the sovereignty over the Andamans which was ostentatiously handed over to the *Azad Hind* (Free India) Government convinced them of fascist bad faith, and that in any case the enthusiastic support the I.N.A. got from Indians in Japanese-

occupied countries, whatever its international and ideological implications, was evidence of their one overwhelming desire, namely, the freedom of India. At the Red Fort trial, Jawaharlal Nehru appeared as one of the defence counsel, but while the court battle had its own significance, the real battle was fought in the streets of Calcutta and elsewhere. The people's hearts and hopes had been stirred, and scenes of unarmed people fighting military and police repression were seen on a brave scale.

The November incidents were surpassed in February, 1946, when essentially similar incidents in widely separated parts of the country bore striking witness to our people's resolution that they would not suffer much longer the agony and humiliation of unfreedom, and were ready and willing to pay the price of that resolution. From February 12 onwards, Calcutta was in flames. The police fired on demonstrators who demanded the release of Abdur Rashid, an I.N.A. prisoner to whom clemency had been refused. The result was an upsurge, spontaneous and magnificent, uniting Hindu and Muslim more notably even than in November, though the Government had probably planned, in the case of Rashid who was a Muslim, to drive a wedge between the two communities. In the demonstration were men like Shaheed Suhrawardy, later to win wide notoriety as an engineer of communal conflict and a reactionary leader of the Muslim League; even such people, willy-nilly, had to fall in step with the people or lose all hold over them.

There started, almost simultaneously, strikes among naval and air forces, among soldiers and policemen, in different parts of the country. Such phenomena are inconceivable in normal times, but the times were not normal, and the affiliation was clear between discontent in the armed forces and the prevailing upsurge of popular feeling against the detested thraldom of imperialism. And the most important and impressive incident of the time was the great strike in the Royal Indian Navy and the concomitant happenings in Bombay (February 21—23) and elsewhere in the country. Official figures showed that military shootings had taken, in forty-eight hours, a toll of no less than 250 civilian lives—a record for the British administration. The unity symbolised in the hundreds of Congress, League and Communist flags intertwined, was

also a record and showed that despite divisions and vacillation in the top leadership the people were moving, all together. "For the first time", said the manifesto of the Central Naval Strike Committee, "the blood of men in the services and of men in the streets flowed together in a common cause. We, in the services, will never forget this. We know also that you, our brothers and sisters, will not forget. Long live our great people. Jai Hind !"[13]

This period (November 1945-July 1946) saw also intense, widespread and recurrent struggle of the working class, and to a lesser extent, of the peasantry. The highest point was reached with the magnificent preparations for an all India general strike of railwaymen and of postal and telegraph workers. Jawaharlal Nehru seemed to respond to the spirit of the times and spoke of "enormous upheavals" if the people's urge for freedom was not soon satisfied, but with Gandhi as their guide, the leadership, fearful of such upheavals, did all they could do to canalise them into sedate and respectable conduct. On December 10, 1945, Lord Wavell made a speech in Calcutta, twitting the 'Quit India' slogan which, he said, "will not act as the magic sesame which opened Ali Baba's cave." The Congress Working Committee, meeting in Calcutta at the same time, passed a resolution, "the most important" of the session as the president, Maulana Azad called it, reaffirming non-violence and deploring the November incidents. The resolution on the I.N.A. laid down that sympathy for them "do not mean that the Congress has in any way deviated from its policy of attaining Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means." Gandhi took a large part in the deliberations; he and other Congress leaders including Nehru had closed-door talks with Casey, Governor of Bengal, in course of which, it was reported, plans were made for detaching Congress from the developing mass movement.

That the spirit of Indian resistance had not been weakened either by the crushing of the 1942 struggle or the defeat of the I.N.A. did not gladden Gandhi's heart, but on the contrary disturbed him. He was the principal figure in the pourparlers, in December 1945, with Governor Casey in Calcutta, and no doubt fathered the Congress Working Committee's "non-violence" resolution which virtually declared its dissociation from the popular upsurge. A week before the

Royal Indian Navy mutiny, he wrote in *Harijan* : "Hatred is in the air and the impatient lovers of the country will gladly take advantage of it, if they can, through violence, to further the cause of independence..... The hypnotism of the I.N.A. has cast its spell upon us. Netaji's name is one to conjure with..... (But) his action was doomed to failure, and I would have said so, even if he had brought his INA victorious to India, because the masses would not have come into their own in this manner." It was with "painful interest" that he had followed the RIN mutiny events, he said. "This mutiny in the navy and what is following is not in any sense of the term, non-violent action". He wanted "Indian members of the Navy" to cultivate non-violence, and affirmed that by their action they were "setting a bad and unbecoming example."

Sometimes the words used by Gandhi were mystifying. "There is such a thing", he wrote, "as thoughtful violent action", but the naval mutiny was "thoughtless". And with a naiveté hard to credit in one of his political intelligence, he said : "The rulers have declared their intention to 'Quit' in favour of Indian rule. Let the action be not delayed by a moment because of the exhibition of this distressful unrest." Referring to Aruna Asaf Ali's protest at his attitude, he wrote: "Aruna would 'rather unite Hindus and Muslims at the barricades than on the constitution front'. Even in terms of violence, this is a misleading proposition." Gandhi had such faith in the British Cabinet Misson to India which had been announced that he added : "She (Aruna) is entitled to say that the people 'are not interested in the ethics of violence or non-violence', but the people are very much interested in knowing the way which will bring freedom to the masses, violence or non-violence. The people have, however imperfectly, hitherto gone the way of non-violence. Aruna and her comrades have to ask themselves every time whether the non-violent way has or has not raised India from her slumber of ages." Gandhi, doubtless, had no idea then that Britain's manner of transferring power, first encouraging and then insisting on partition, while feigning dislike of it, would bring, as its inevitable concomitant, violence on a scale more dreadful than in most revolutions in history. There was, in the minds of Congress leaders, an impression that Britain was preparing to leave and we needed only, with happy non-

violence, to help their packing. And so, even Jawaharlal Nehru ridiculed the naval mutiny; he had certain qualms, however, for he tried, almost on the defensive, to explain that barricades and 18th century methods of revolution were out of date: "You cannot fight machine guns with rifles and match big guns with small guns." He conceded that "the iron wall which Britain created between the Indian Army and the Indian people has collapsed", but he forgot, under the influence of Gandhi and his other colleagues, that while sporadic violence can never result in the people's seizure of power, it was vain and wrong to advise a slave people never in any circumstance to take recourse to arms in which they were necessarily outmatched by the state, and to imply that the RIN action was a mere, detached incident and was not helping to forge unity between the people and the armed forces so that together they might triumph over the oppressor.[14]

The brave, new wave of the people's discontent forced from the hands of the British Government steps that could mollify it a little. A delegation of three British cabinet ministers came to India to negotiate with political parties during April and May 1946. The proposals they made, both long-term and short-term, were essays in an ingenuity which did not fail imperialism even when at bay. According to the long-term proposals, a constituent assembly was to be elected by the newly elected provincial legislatures, and the provinces were to be grouped as A, B and C, each group having the right to secede from the Union—an arrangement which would meet partially the League demand for partition. According to the short-term proposals, an interim government was to be formed at the centre, with the Congress, the Muslim League and other parties and groups participating. There was protracted negotiation, and communal conflict, easy in the fractious temper of the time to engineer, clouded and overshadowed the shine of mass struggle. In a troubled context, the interim government was formed in the second half of 1946 and a year later, the transfer of power took place. It was a period of massive sorrow and at the same time of a triumph that breaks through every agony. It was a period of spiritual stress when Gandhi's character shone as perhaps never before in his eventful life. And it is to this last phase that our attention must now turn.

Note To Chapter X

[1] Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. VI. p. 135 ; Horace Alexander, "India Since Cripps", pp. 37-41.

[2] Tendulkar, *op. cit. pp.* 122, 212.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 215; E. M. S. Namboodiripad in "New Age" (monthly), March 1955.

[4] Nehru, "The Discovery of India" pp. 484-85.

[5] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* pp. 191-208.

[6] "India Unreconciled" (1943) *passim.*

[7] *Ibid.* pp. 114-123, 124-26.

[8] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 250.

[9] *Ibid*, pp. 251-52, 259-60, 332.

[10] *Ibid.* pp. 322-26.

[11] *Ibid.* pp. 239-31.

[12] *Ibid.* pp. 333-56, for the story of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks ; cf. Louis Fischer, "Life of Mahatma Gandhi", p. 469.

[13] Mukerjee, "India struggles for Freedom", pp. 206 ff ; and references therein.

[14] *Ibid.* pp. 209-10 ; Tendulkar, *op. cit.* pp. 76-79.

CHAPTER XI

The Last Phase

When at last, by devious pathways, freedom came to a partitioned India, Gandhi did not have long to live, and he was too anguished even to wish to live much longer. He had often before expressed the desire to live to be a hundred and twentyfive years old, but now, it seems, he had had enough. This last phase of his life, agonised as he felt like the Christ at Gethsemane, is perhaps greater than any other, more rounded, more superbly human, and more effulgent.

There was none in the country more unhappy than this "Father of the Nation" before whom even the Scribes and the Pharisees had then begun to bow, and whose fame as the architect of freedom was to be the greatest capital of his political followers. On August 15, 1947, when the transfer of power took place, the Congress president, Acharya Kripalani, issued a "message to the nation" and saluted Mahatma Gandhi as the maker of a freedom achieved uniquely—"never before was so great an event consumated with such little bloodshed and violence." The great man's heart, however, was not gladdened; when asked for a message of his own, he said "he had run dry", and "when told again that if he did not give any message, it would not be good, Gandhi replied: 'There is no message at all; if it is bad, let it be so'." This was no casual obduracy; five months later, on January 26, 1948, when Independence Day was celebrated, and four days before he died, he said he was "disillusioned" about independence—"at least I am, even if you are not".[1]

The reasons for this massive grief deserve a careful investigation. One reason, surely, was the sick wave of communal frenzy, unlike anything seen before in the course of the national movement—slowly and sullenly welling in the June '46 incidents at places so far apart as Madura and Ahmedabad, and then breaking all bounds of humanity after the Muslim League's "Direct Action" in Calcutta on August 16

touched off a campaign of mutual violence that was conceived in folly and executed in filth. It was exactly at this time that developments leading to the August '47 transfer of power were taking place, the formation a year earlier, for instance, of the Interim Indian Government. To Gandhi it appeared as if the principles he had been propagating for a whole life-time had met with a grievous debacle. "What we have practised during the past thirty years", he said on July 14, 1946, "was not non-violent resistance but passive resistance, which only the weak offer, because they are unable, not unwilling, to offer an armed resistance. If we knew the use of non-violent resistance, which only those with the hearts of oak can offer, we would present to the world a totally different picture of free India, instead of an India cut in twain, one part highly suspicious of the other, and the two too much engaged in mutual strife to be able to think cogently of the food and clothing of the hungry and naked millions, who know no religion but that of the one and only God, who appears to them in the guise of necessaries of life."

It was exactly here that Gandhi confronted the most crucial spiritual dilemma, and unable to overcome it, he conceded failure. He was realist enough to know that he could not conjure a popular movement by spiritual magic ; in *Harijan* of July 26, 1942, he had written : "You will see that my influence, great as it may appear to outsiders, is strictly limited ; I may have considerable influence to conduct a campaign for redress of popular grievance because people are ready and need a helper. But I have no influence to direct people's energy in a channel in which they have no interest." For his message of non-violence, the people, doubtless, had the greatest respect. And all who acted for the country's freedom were willing enough to try non-violent methods of struggle, not so much as a matter of principle, but of expediency and of the greatest good of the greatest number. Who, indeed, would prefer violence with its concomitant complications if non-violent methods could really be the open sesame to freedom ? But when unfreedom meant the sure perpetuation of the age-old misery of "the hungry and naked millions", when the people, filled with a righteous impatience at imperialism's last-ditch efforts to prolong its grip, were straining at the leash and were only too eager to start a movement that would not,

for it could not, swear by non-violence, the Mahatma felt helpless and incapacitated by the very logic of facts to give an effective lead to the country. He was afraid of "the mad orgy" of the people if they took to the path of struggle; but he could not prevent the orgy which communalism generated in an atmosphere of frustrated hopes. Sensing the feeling in the air, he had supported the All India Congress Committee's majority decision, by 204 to 51 votes, in favour of joining the Constituent Assembly on July 7, 1946, and he wrote in *Harijan*: "Is independence to be bought at the price of a bloody revolution, as was, say, the French, or the Soviet, or even the English? Then, frank and honest work has yet to begin" —work that he, at any rate, would never undertake. He was warning the country of "the danger from within", which "corrodes the soul", while "the danger from without.....polishes". To an American professor some time later, he said that communal conflict had nearly taken on the dimensions of a civil war because *satyagraha* had not sunk deep in people's minds. "Indians harboured ill-will and anger against their erstwhile rulers, while they pretended to resist them non-violently. Their resistance, therefore, was inspired by violence, and not by regard for the man in the British, whom they should convert through satyagraha. Now that the British were voluntarily quitting India, the apparent non-violence went to pieces in a moment."[2]

It is a trifle exasperating to hear the Mahatma's words when they testified to a fixation wholly out of conformity with his wholesome realism. If, indeed, the British were "voluntarily quitting India", it was a noble gesture which, on Gandhi's own analysis, should at once have evoked in India a generous response and something like a new surge of character. It did not, for the very good reason—quite apart from the idea that Gandhi held—that the British were playing a very deep game and left no stone unturned nor a cutlet uncooked in order to maintain their hold, openly or deviously, for as long as they could. This is not the place to detail that story of British intrigue, but a few salient land-marks in the intrigue should perhaps be recalled.

When in the summer of 1946 the British Cabinet Mission arrived, Gandhi adjured his doubting countrymen: "Is the official deputation coming to deceive a great nation? It is

neither manly nor womanly to think so." The Cabinet Mission, however, proposed no immediate transfer of power, no specification of the date of independence, no mention of the withdrawal of the British army of occupation. The Constituent Assembly was to be a special body whose composition and procedure had been entirely fixed by a unilateral British decision. Nominees of the Princes, medieval hang-overs in a modern world, were to form one-fourth of this body; the rest were to be elected by provincial assemblies, themselves constituted on a limited and communally demarcated franchise; while a Union Centre was to deal with foreign affairs, defence and communications, there was to be something like a partition of India into three regional groups, apart, of course, from the States where the writ even of truncated democracy was not to run. A question in the House of Lords elicited the information that the much-talked of "Interim Government" was the Viceroy's old Executive Council with only the personnel altered. Indianisation of the army under the plan would, the British Commander-in-chief said in the Central Legislature, "take ten years, twenty years or more." The British "socialist" Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, said in Parliament during December 1946, about the plan : "I have always thought of Mr. Churchill as a great historian, but he seems to have forgotten some recent history. When he talks of India, he seems to have forgotten the Cripps mission, the declaration made in his own interim government by Mr. Amery—and our declaration has gone no further than that." Professor Laski, then chairman of the British Labour Party, asked Indian nationalist leaders to "appreciate this offer made on a gold platter"—the platter had to be gold when its contents were somewhat tinsel—but there was, naturally, much misgiving in the country, a suspicion of Britain being goaded by an unwonted magnanimity, and a fear that "British political vocabulary is so rich in shades of meaning that the word 'independence' may mean a great deal as well as very little."[3]

There were reasons, indeed, for the sudden British magnanimity, but Gandhi did not appreciate those reasons, P. J. Griffiths, leader of the European Group in the Indian Central Assembly said in the course of his speech to the East India Association in London on June 24, 1946 : "India in the opinion of many was on the verge of a revolution before the

British Cabinet Mission arrived. The Cabinet Mission has at least postponed, if not eliminated, the danger." It is well known how in order to pour oil on troubled waters Britain offered India plans of political freedom, but at the same time designedly and continuously sustained Muslim League fanaticism in order that the waters might remain troubled enough for Britain not to lose her whiphand over the Indian scene. It sounds diabolic, but why must one imagine the world's craftiest imperialism to be of dove-like innocence? And when Congress and the League prated, each in its own way, of independence and treated separately with British imperialists; when each painted the other black, the League outshining Congress in the process; when Congress, screening a new-found sedateness behind Jawaharlal's fascinatingly equivocal phrases, shied as gracefully as it could from the contemplation of militant anti-imperialist struggle, for which the toiling people, Hindu and Muslim, had shown they were ready; when the League, blinded by pettiness, blatantly proclaimed its indifference towards the real struggle for freedom, the result could only be the cruel disaster which communal carnage represented and which put fresh heart in sagging imperialism.

The Right Honourable V. V. Alexander, member of the Cabinet Mission, said in the House of Commons on July 18, 1946: "We have to deal with a situation when there is a political awakening throughout the world and especially in the East, and if some attempt had not been made to get the agreement we have so far secured in India, I am certain we should have faced a position of uprising and of bloodshed and disturbances in India already, and with a future military commitment that no one could at the present moment forecast." This referred not to communal conflict—over which imperialism gloated, and which had not become too obtrusive in mid-1946—but to the massive unrest of our common people, working by hand and by brain, seeking the balm of freedom. The lone Communist member of the Constituent Assembly had tried to move at that time an amendment to Nehru's resolution on objectives, calling on the interim government to function as if it was the government of free India, but it was ruled out of order! What Government needed most of all was to base itself on the broad masses of the people, and by its action in the common interest to dispel the ugly miasma of a developing

communalism. That, however, was not to be, and the price of the failure had to be borne by the country.

Not Gandhi and the Congress alone, but the organisation and leadership of more militant sections of our people must also share the blame for the horrible decline of the nation's morale as the communal poison spread out. And to Gandhi's eternal honour it must be said that till the last breath of his being, he fought with his own weapons to efface it. When on the eve of August '47 and after it, darkness descended on the country and a kind of madness seized our people, it was Gandhi who, like the rock of ages, sustained faith in humanity and worked unremittingly to revive it. "How many realise", wrote Jawaharlal Nehru, "what it has meant to India to have the presence of Mahatma Gandhi during these months?" His moving words may further be quoted: "Fear and hatred blinded our minds and all the restraints which civilization imposes were swept away. Horror piled on horror, and sudden emptiness seized us at the brute savagery of human beings. The lights seemed all to go out; not all, for a few still flickered in the raging tempest. We sorrowed for the dead and the dying, and for those whose suffering was greater than that of death. We sorrowed even more for India, our common mother, for whose freedom we had laboured these long years.

"The lights seemed to go out. But one bright flame continued to burn and shed its light on the surrounding gloom. And looking at that pure flame, strength and hope returned to us and we felt that whatever momentary disaster might overwhelm our people, there was the spirit of India, strong and unsullied, rising above the turmoil of the present and not caring for the petty exigencies of the day."[4]

It was in this period of gloom that Gandhi, embodying in himself the very soul of our land, went from place to place with his message of peace and fellow feeling. He spent several weeks in the Noakhali district of Bengal, moving on foot, at seventyseven years of age, from village to village, often across precarious bamboo bridges; he went to Bihar, planned to visit Punjab, went and stayed in Calcutta, again moved over to Delhi—wherever, indeed, his healing presence was needed most of all. In late 1946, when he was in Noakhali, he still had the hope that partition of the country, which to him was "sin", could be avoided, if Muslims and Hindus could co-exist

in amity and with honour in Bengal. "If Bengal," he said, "at this critical juncture, plays the game the whole of India is saved. That is why I have become a Bengali today. All my old loves, including Uruli (Uruli-Kanchan in Poona district, where he had set up a nature-cure clinic cheap enough for the people to make use of it), have been left behind."[5] In Bihar, things had gone so far that Nehru, then vice-president of the Viceroy's Executive Council (known then as the Interim Government), threatened, in a moment of angry exasperation, that bombs would be hurled from the air if the rioting continued. Gandhi disapproved, for if he had his way even Governments should invariably practise non-violence, but apart from ideology, his ways were in themselves different. "If ever you become mad again", he told Bihar people, "you must destroy me first." In Calcutta, he lived in a Muslim house in August-September, 1947, which some fanatics raided, but he triumphed so, that C. Rajagopalachari, then Governor of West Bengal, wrote: "Gandhiji has achieved many things, but there has been nothing, not even independence, which is so truly wonderful as his victory over evil in Calcutta." In Delhi, the effulgence of his character spread a sort of halo which, as it were, shamed communalism into a retreat. Typical of his manner and of his courage was the incident in April 1947 when he asked if anyone in his prayer meeting objected to a recitation from the Koran, and on several doing so, broke off the meeting rather than omit the Koranic hymn; the same thing happened on two more evenings, and then on the fourth day, none dared object. Vincent Sheean has left a moving record of the last great days of Gandhi's life in Delhi—his fasts, his indomitable espousal of the guarantees that a secular state must give to all, irrespective of religious persuasion, his prayer-meetings: "I am late by ten minutes", he murmured as he came for his last prayer, "I should be here at the stroke of five"—and in a matter of seconds he was shot at and was dead.[6]

This last phase of Gandhi's life must be among the noblest in the annals of man. Two days before his martyrdom he had spoken of the possibility of his "dying by the bullets of a mad man" and of his assurance that if that happened, he would die smiling, with God in his heart and His name on his lips. "Even in his death", wrote Nehru in *Harijan* (February 2, 1948) "there was a magnificence and complete artistry. It

was from every point of view a fitting climax to the man and to the life he had lived. Indeed it heightened the lesson of his life. He died in the fulness of his powers and as he would no doubt have liked to die, at the moment of prayer. He died a martyr to the cause of unity to which he had always been devoted and for which he had worked unceasingly, more especially during the past year or more. He died suddenly, as all men should wish to die. There was no fading away of the body or a long illness or the forgetfulness of the mind which comes with age....."

Even so, there was more than a touch of tragedy to the death of Gandhi. To the end he had opposed the "vivisection of India", and when at last he acquiesced, something had snapped inside his heart. For months, as communal frenzy swept the country, he felt "nothing but agony"—he could hardly live and breathe in that atmosphere. The fabric of life that he had reared for decades seemed to topple down all about him. Even his trusted colleagues and disciples appeared remote—there was no lonelier figure than Gandhi at Noakhali, recalling his favourite Tagore lines: "If none responds to your call, walk alone, walk alone!" India had become politically free, but it was not the freedom of his dreams. "My own doctrine is failing", he had said to an interviewer in Bengal on December 5, 1946. "I do not want to die as a failure but as a successful man. But it may be that I may die a failure." This consciousness of failure was prominent when after months of stolid opposition to partition—he was for a time even taken in with the idea of a United Bengal and in May 1947 actually offered to work as Suhrawardy's honorary private secretary "if you (Suhrawardy) would disabuse me of all the suspicion against you and if you would always retain Bengal for the Bengalis, Hindus and Musalmans, intact by non-violent means"[7]—he recommended ratification by the All India Congress Committee of the acceptance by Congress leaders of the British plan (June 3, 1947) of partition. Unpalatable decisions, he said, have sometimes to be taken, and referring to those "who talked in terms of an immediate revolution or of an upheaval in the country", he added, wearily, "Well, I have no strength to do it".[8]

Some kind of a "revolution", which conceivably might

have taken the edge off the partition movement and united different sections of the people in a common struggle was by no means then a wish-fulfilling hope. When even Anglo-Saxon phlegm was over-wrought, there seems no particular reason for our scepticism on this score. In his well-known work, "Mission with Mountbatten". Alan Campbell Johnson wrote : "India in March 1947 was a ship on fire in mid-ocean with ammunition in the hold. By then it was a question of putting out the fire before it reached the ammunition. There was in fact no option before us but to do what we did." Even the *Daily Mail* (London) admitted editorially that if Britain had wanted to stay on in India "it would have needed an occupation force of 500,000 men", but it was just unavailable on account of other commitments. On March 5, 1947, Sir Stafford Cripps made a statement in Parliament, purporting *inter alia* that Britain had "fundamentally two alternatives"—either, to maintain direct power in India by "a considerable reinforcement of troops" ; or to make the political transfer on the lines of the 1947 settlement. "The first alternative had been judged" impossible..... We (Britain) had not the power to carry it out." There was, therefore, hardly a choice in the matter. This is why the *Manchester Guardian* commented in a cautious editorial on October 11, 1947 : "Public opinion has preened itself on British virtue in withdrawing voluntarily from India ; but posterity may dwell rather on the hustle with which the withdrawal was carried out. .....It may be hard to disentangle whether the British action was based on high principle or on a less glorious desire to retreat to shelter before the storm broke." At the time, however, the dominant Indian leadership was enamoured of British gestures and of Mountbatten who, with consummate skill, put them across. They applauded the good Attlee, prime minister of Britain, when he made a declaration of Britain's policy towards India. "Successive British Governments", he claimed, had worked for "the realization of self-government in India" ; since, however, there seemed little chance of "all parties" agreeing on the Cabinet Mission's plans, steps should be taken, anyhow, "to effect the transfer of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948." Power, he added, would be handed over "to some form of central government for British India, or in some areas to the existing provincial government,

or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interest of the Indian people." He also further stated that there was no intention, on the final transfer of power, "to hand over powers and obligations under paramountcy to any government of British India", so that the rulers of the Indian states, checker-boarding India's map for so long in Britain's interest, would be free either to join on their own terms any of the states to be formed in India or to proclaim their independence. The Attlee declaration was given a great welcome, but its features were plain. Every single fissiparous trend in India found in it the requisite encouragement. There was no call now for the Muslim League to come to terms with Congress; division of the country was frankly envisaged by the British Cabinet. Even Congress which had denounced a division of India with the utmost vehemence now only hoped for the best—hadn't Attlee spoken of "some form of central government" and hadn't he a year earlier said he would prevent a minority obstructing what the majority wanted? It prepared at the same time for the worst, for partition. Communal strife notwithstanding, the common people's upsurge had not abated to the extent desired, and the Attlee Declaration came in handy. The Congress leadership, as if suddenly awaking to the inevitability of partition, proposed that Muslim-majority provinces (which might get "independence" from Mr. Attlee) like Punjab and Bengal should be divided, so that areas where Hindus formed the larger number could keep out of Pakistan and remain with the rest of India. Thus, Congress virtually accepted the principle of partition, and that unfortunately not on a conceivable basis of nationalities but of religion.[9]

Fearful of boldly solving the dilemma—hurl for real freedom the organised strength of the people who, in disorganisation even, had shown their mettle, or accept a glittering, if somewhact specious, offer of independence—the Congress leadership chose the latter course. Gandhi, deeply disturbed, could counsel no other course either. It was the signal, immediately, for extreme communal reaction on either side to rear its ugly head—the joint Gandhi-Jinnah denunciation, in April 1947, of "the use of force to achieve political ends" was pretty futile—and senseless fratricide was summoned, in Punjab, in Calcutta and elsewhere, out of the catacombs of bestiality

which underlie so much of us. To imperialism, which must have made its own calculations, this, indeed, was like manna from heaven. If Hindus and Muslims could condemn themselves out of their own mouths and proclaim their inability to form one proud state of their own, nothing could please imperialism better. So Mountbatten, emerging happy and proud from his gracious confabulations with querulous Indian leaders, left for London to confer with his principals on steps to follow. And on June 3, returning from home, he announced the plan for the transfer of power—a partition on communal lines of Bengal, Punjab and a part of Assam, and a division of British India into two Dominions as from August 15, 1947, the Indian Union and Pakistan.

Eulogy was showered on Britain for this act of grace and Jawaharlal Nehru, commending to his people the June 3 settlement as the only way out of a crisis, thanked Mountbatten for his "assistance to India". Jinnah was happier, regretting only that Pakistan was not getting all the area he wanted. Every device of propaganda was utilised to make Mountbatten the hero of the scene. And all this because the country's leadership—which can only be what the country deserves—was unwilling, and even afraid, to call on the people for a united movement for thorough-going freedom, the very process of which would have meant a moral cleansing, a lighting of that glow in the people's heart which has been missing even since independence. A price would certainly have to be paid, and to Gandhi, who more than his disciples and friends felt the shock of partition and its concomitants, that price was too heavy. When the casualties of communalism, before and after August 1947 are computed, it is hard to say that we did not pay a much heavier price. To that, however, a blind eye was turned, and to this day one hears echoes of the thought that in 1947 we had from Britain a magnanimous and voluntary gift of freedom—which "blesseth him that gives and him that takes"—while on any objective analysis it can be seen to be a conscious political manoeuvre extorted by conditions of crisis which were beyond the power of imperialism to control.

Thoughts too deep for tears must have passed through the mind of Gandhi in this period, when his principal lieutenants, now beginning to be busy with the cares of state, were acclaiming the transfer of power as the climax of a national move-

ment led by Gandhi, while the leader himself was a stranger to such enthusiasm and contemplated how best to repair the damage to Hindu-Muslim and Indo-Pakistan relationships as well as to fight the decay and degradation which, with power, had entered into the Congress organisation. From public life he could not retire—and he never actually did—for his position, as Bernard Shaw once said, was "natural, not official", and his was the kind of leadership very unlike "a plug of tobacco that can be passed from one man to another." But he was now a lonelier figure than ever before—no doubt, amidst his entourage he had always been fundamentally lonely —and conscious that his political work, from which he could not, if he wished it, stay away, had been a failure. Jawaharlal Nehru would go to him, of course, off and on for counsel, even for problems like Kashmir, but it was less, it may be hazarded, for concrete suggestions than for the sheer, ineffable calm and benediction which flowed to him from the Mahatma's personality as it did from the mountains of our land and from the sea. Acharya Kripalani, one of the few who stood very close to Gandhi and kept a mind of his own, made a speech at the June (1947) meeting of the AICC which is being here, in part, quoted :

"I have been with Gandhiji for the last thirty years. I joined him in Champaran. I have never swayed in my loyalty to him. It is not a personal but a political loyalty. Even when I have differed from him I have considered his political instinct to be more correct than my elaborately reasoned attitude. Today also I feel that he, with his supreme fearlessness, is correct and my stand is defective. Why then am I not with him ? *It is because I feel that he has yet found no way of tackling the problem on a mass basis.* When he taught us non-violent non-coperation he showed us a definite method which we had at least mechanically followed. Today he is groping in the dark. He was in Noakhali. His efforts eased the situation. Now he is in Bihar. The situation is again eased. But this does not solve in any way the flare-up in the Punjab. He says he is solving the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity for the whole of India in Bihar. May be. But it is difficult to see how that is being done. There are no definite steps as in non-violent non-coperation that lead to the desired goal.

"And then unfortunately for us today, though he can enunciate policies they have to be in the main carried out by others, and these others are not converted to his way of thinking.

"It is under these painful circumstances that I have supported the division of India." (Italics added).[10]

More than any other man in India, Gandhi gave thought at this stage to the chances of mollifying the evils of partition. In one of his after-prayer speeches reported in *Harijan* of July 20, 1947, he said : "This evening I propose to show how we can, if we will, turn the calamity into a blessing. It will profit us nothing to brood over the past or to blame this party or that. Technically, freedom is yet to come a few days hence. In fact, the parties have jointly accepted the situation and there is no turning back. Only the inscrutable Providence can undo what men have agreed to do.

"One easy and ready way is for the Congress and the League to come together and arrive at a mutual understanding *without the intervention of the Viceroy.* The League has to make the first move. I do not at all suggest the undoing of Pakistan. Let that be treated as an established fact beyond dispute or discussion. But they can sit together in a mud hut large enough to accommodate not more than ten representatives and undertake not to part till they have reached an agreement. I dare swear that if such an event occurs, it will be infinitely better than the Bill recognising the independence of India cut up into two states enjoying equal status.

"Neither the Hindus nor the Muslims are happy over what is happening before their helpless selves. This is first-hand evidence, unless the Hindus and Muslims who see me or correspond with me are deceiving me. But it is a big *but*— I seem to be aiming at the impossible. *Now that the British intervention has done the trick,* how can the League be expected to come down to their adversaries and produce an agreed settlement as between brothers and friends ?" (Italics added).

In the same number of *Harijan*, he wrote again : "Man had the supreme knack of deceiving himself. The Englishman was supremest among men. He was quitting because he had discovered that it was wrong on economic and political grounds to hold India in bondage. Herein he was quite sincere. It would not be denied, however, that sincerity was quite consis-

tent with self-deception. He was self-deceived in that he believed that he could not leave India to possible anarchy if such was to be India's lot. He was quite content to leave India as a cockpit between two organised armies. *Before quitting, he was setting the seal of approval on the policy of playing off one community against another.*" (Italics added).[11]

The irony is somewhat Shavian, but the more notable thing is that Gandhi looked upon partition as the result of Britain's long drawn-out policy of 'Divide and Rule', and said as much more unquivocally than he had done for many a long day. It is significant that as early as 1920, he had given India this warning : "Before we become a nation possessing an effective voice in the councils of nations, we must be prepared to contemplate, with equanimity, not a thousand murders of innocent men and women, but many thousands before we attain a status in the world that shall not be surpassed by any nation".[12] When, towards the end of 1945, he had advised the Congress Working Committee to reject the Cabinet Mission's original proposal, he had perhaps in mind the possibility of a satyagraha movement. Now, again, after June 2, 1947, his heart perhaps wanted recourse to satyagraha, but only the ache remained. He himself was fearful that in the temper of the country, a struggle was sure to go out of the bounds he set, and his ablest lieutenants, having long borne much and now arriving at some kind of a fair-weather port, were chary, very probably, of any kind of struggle. Gandhi's spiritual dilemma remained unsolved ; he felt his mission had been vain, and it was only because he lived in mankind that he could not withdraw, as any mere saint would, into his own soul's shell. Even in his weakness, for he had indeed failed, there shone out the man's sheer sublimity. The last ounce of his physical and spiritual energy was to be spent now in the service of his people and of truth as he saw it.

In reply to a correspondent on the occasion of his birthday in 1947 he wrote saying that in all humility he had "shed the wish" to live 125 years and that he would "invoke the aid of the Almighty to take me away from this 'vale of tears' rather than make me a helpless witness of the butchery by man become savage, whether he dares to call himself as Muslim or Hindu or what not." He was perplexed and perturbed, his *Gita* detachment impaired, "far away from the condition of

equipoise." But he had faith and could see the rainbow in the rain. "You must not lose faith in humanity", he wrote; "Humanity is an ocean : if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty." Partition, of course, was a settled fact, an evil and eventually even might "bring good out of evil." It was with this faith that he sustained his life and his work—to purge the Congress of the dross that, with the decline of idealism, had accumulated, and to have Hindu and Muslim everywhere, and the States of India and Pakistan, as brothers and friends for all that had happened.

Even before 1947, he castigated the growing tendency among Congressmen towards personal aggrandisement—the lure of the Constituent Assembly had spoilt many a Congressman's virtue. One of the reasons for his last fast in January 1948—its primary reason was communalism in Delhi—was factionalism and corruption in Congress circles; an old and respected colleague from Andhra, Konda Venkatappaya, had written to say : "The taste of political power has turned their heads....." Gandhi felt it strongly, for it was men, not measures, that he had always insisted upon, and if the salt loses its savour, wherewith shall it indeed be salted? It was yet another confession of failure, for Gandhi had endeavoured to call to national service a corps of the elect, and tested, they were, many of them, found wanting. Few of the Congress leaders gave thought to such things, but Gandhi did. With a small core of the faithful, represented today by men like Vinoba Bhave, who made no essay into the wide spaces of thought but were content, with their Master, to see and go one step at a time, Gandhi sought to overcome the new crisis of character in the Congress. He advised dissolution of the Congress and conversion of it into a *Lok Sewak Sangh*. The advice was not taken, and Gandhi, with a chosen few, had to go it alone."[18]

Even so, his links with erstwhile colleagues were too strong to sever and Gandhi was called in to give counsel, which he did without demur, when Congress President Kripalani, annoyed with the ways of the Congress Government, gave in his resignation, or when there was friction, about the time Gandhi died, between Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel. Such goings-on convinced him that the Congress should turn itself into a very different kind of organisation, uninterested in political power and with the accent only on the people's service

in ways that Gandhi had thought of all his life. He preferred to matter-of-fact success enlistment in the forlorn hope of idealism ; it was a beautiful hope, but on our harried planet inevitably forlorn.

Not much need be said about his last days in Delhi—few chapters in Indian history are as ennobling and words to describe them do not come easily. Here was a man frail of body and limited of mind, frankly unconversant with theories of social evolution, but with a heart so large and a determination so trained, that he could represent India at her finest ; he had often done it before, but this time it was superb. Indian humanity was recovering itself after the shock of partition, but if any one man did, he gave it the greatest moral impetus. Other good forces were of course at work, but if any one man wrought a miracle, in Delhi in 1948 as in Calcutta the year before, it was Mahatma Gandhi. It was no simple matter when the Government of India, driven beyond endurance by Pakistan's Kashmir policy, was yet persuaded by Gandhi to make her a payment, which could well be withheld, of fifty crores of rupees. It was no simple matter to have peace in Delhi, when even at his prayer-meeting a bomb was thrown by some fanatic ten days before another attack killed him. The manner of his death, on January 30, 1948, was in keeping with his life. Greater love hath no man than this that he lays down his life for his people. and he did so, in harness, unto the last.

Note To Chapter XI

[1] Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. VIII. pp. 95-96, 338.

[2] *Ibid.* Vol. VII. pp. 57, 177 ff ; VIII p. 105.

[3] R. P. Dutt, "A New Chapter in Divide and Rule" (1946), *passim* ; H. N. Mukerjee, "Indian Struggles for Freedom", pp. 215-20.

[4] J. Nehru, "On Gandhi" (New York, 1948), pp. 121-22.

[5] N. K. Bose, "My Days with Gandhi", pp. 70-71.

[6] Vincent Sheean, "Lead, Kindly Light", pp. 285-86.

[7] Quoted in Bose, *op. cit.* pp. 232, 252.

[8] Tendulkar, *op. cit.* p. 19.

[9] Quotations in R. P. Dutt, "The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire", pp. 154-55 ; cf. Mukerjee, *op.* cit. 230-32.

[10] Bose, *op. cit.* pp. 244-45.

[11] *Ibid.* pp. 247-248.

[12] *Ibid.* p. 249, quoting from "Selections from Gandhi", (1948) p. 121.

[13] Tendulkar, op. cit. VII. p. 508 ; VIII pp. 176, 302-03.

CHAPTER XII

GANDHI AND INDIA

"Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this, ever in flesh and blood, walked upon this earth." Thus wrote Albert Einstein about Mahatma Gandhi on his seventieth birthday. Yet another of the great ones of creation, Rabindranath Tagore, said about him : "He (Gandhi) stopped at the thresholds of the huts of the thousands of the dispossessed, dressed like one of their own. He spoke to them in their own language ; here was living truth at last, and not quotations from books. For this reason the 'Mahatma', the name given to him by the people of India, is his real name. Who else has felt like him that all Indians are his own flesh and blood ? In direct contact with truth, the crushed forces of the soul rise again ; when love came to the door of India that door was opened wide.....At Gandhi's call India blossomed forth to new greatness, just as once before in earlier times, when Buddha proclaimed the truth of fellow-feeling and compassion among all living creatures." Such encomia have fallen to the lot of few men, indeed, in history.

The uniqueness of Gandhi is beyond all question, and his deliberate and at the same time fundamentally effortless merging of himself with the people of India is, in the modern Indian context, amazing. Even in his incongruities he symbolises India. His life is an open book, as pitilessly open as the mountain heights and the plains of India are open to the elements. And in that book, open to all that wish to read it, there are clues, but only clues to the secret of his strength, just as India's heart encases, in a casket she does not easily yield, the secret of her stupendous vitality. None else in recent times has so represented in his life the very spirit of our proud and yet anguished country.

There was about Gandhi a native humanity which, in one who might well be thought of as a gloomy and exacting puritan, is little short of a wonder. This is more so in India where

often a sad and vacuous face symbolises contemplativeness. That it is not necessary to be dreary to be good, that pleasure and pain may be received with something almost like gaiety for they add, as it were, to the richness of life's design, are ideas that only a broad humanity can attain. And of humour, he had an inexhaustible fund—who could laugh as he did when Sarojini Naidu would say that "it cost a lot of money to keep Gandhiji in poverty"? Could a man of lesser stature survive triumphantly and un-selfconsciously the shafts of the world's cartoonists, to whom his loin-cloth and shaven head with protruding ears were a godsend? Could anybody else go to Bukingham Palace in his scanty rig-out and tell journalists afterwards that the King had more clothes on than were needed for the two of them? 'His smile is delightful', wrote Jawaharlal Nehru, "his laughter infectious, and he radiates light-heartedness. There is something childlike about him which is full of charm. When he enters a room, he brings a breath of fresh air with him which lightens the atmosphere." Who, indeed, could resist the fascination and good cheer of a man, hailed by his devotees as world-teacher, who could order, as he did in 1932, a new set of false teeth as he embarked on a fast "unto death'"?

Gandhi was, when so minded, "stiff-necked", "a sweet-tempered dictator" as a well-known American journalist playfully described him, but he had a kind of consideration for other, often very much lesser people, which was habitual and by no means put on—a quality which drew even opponents strongly. Jawaharlal Nehru refers to a telegram he got in jail from Gandhi in September 1932, announcing his intention of going on a fast and asking his opinion—the telegram noting also that he had seen Nehru's daughter "Indu (who) looked happy and in possession of more flesh." If it is thought that his relations with the Nehru family were *sui generis* and the reference to Jawaharlal's daughter need not be made much of, one can refer to a hundred other instances of a similar nature where the people involved were by no means among the elect. Not that he never lost his temper and his balance—he did, and it would be gruesome, in human terms, if he did not; there are several such instances, not by any means carpingly collected, in Nirmal Kumar Bose's authentic record, "My Days with Gandhi". But the letters he found time to write to humble

associates, unbeknown to the wide world, to offer them solace in sorrow or the guidance they needed, are, to say the least, remarkable. How can you fight a man who, as a leftist Congressman once told the writer, asks tenderly after the health of your wife and children even in the course of a trunk telephone talk on political matters? To some it might seem a small thing, but all that can be said is that it isn't.

A certain practical bent is noticeable throughout in Gandhi's character, but a deep concern for people's well-being is surely also the reason for his interest in apparently little things which he sustained till the end of his life. When in the dark days of 1946, he went to Bengal to find, if he could, a non-violent remedy of the communal canker, he began to learn Bengali, for otherwise, he felt, he could not make an entry into the Bengali's heart, and from that period he set apart some time, however short, for practising Bengali—a ritual he did not miss even on the day he died. In the midst of work which would in sheer volume and strain overwhelm almost anyone, he could take his mind off for a while, and write on food habits, on the problem of leprosy, on proper methods of scavengering, on collective prayer, on the gods in the Hindu pantheon and a score of other themes, that do not usually worry the great ones of politics.

To his autobiography, which he did not, on purpose, complete, he gave the title of "Experiments with Truth". He wrote on his own life with a pitiless candour which is witness, in itself, to stupendous moral courage untainted by attitudinising. Who but a mountain of a man could, at sixtyseven, write in *Harijan* of having had a "lust dream", talk to his women secretaries about it, and impose on himself by way of penance a six weeks' silence[1]—this, having practised rigid continence, which he never ceased to recommend to others, since he was was just over thirty? Who but he could say, as he did most naturally: "Once while I was travelling a fellow-passenger saw me eating grapes. He was under the impression that I took only six pice worth of food every day. So he criticised me for not living up to my ideal of complete identification with the poor. I thanked him and told him that he should advertise my weakness. Indeed, ideal and practice often departed from one another".[2] In regard to sex he had developed certain fixations, causing, though rarely, some embarrassing experiments[3].

but in spite of his condemnation of sexual life, except strictly for purposes of procreation, and a horror of sex nearly as great as that of Tolstoy, his tenderness for woman, as Tagore once said, was "one of the noblest and most consistent traits of his character."[4] Here, indeed, is to be seen a very Indian dichotomy. In Indian painting and sculpture the theme most generally favoured has been passionate romance; the feminine form has been viewed with unashamed delight and passion itself considered a symbol for the ultimate meaning and purpose of life. In the greatest sequence of Ajanta paintings, there is a rejoicing in the beauty of the female form, and as W. G. Archer points out in one of his monographs, it is the melancholy of denial which is emphasised in the pictures rather than the misery brought about by passion. In Sanskrit poetry also, there is enraptured expression of man's love for woman, while all the time social conventions were growing, till they ruled Indian life, which inhibited the free play of natural emotion and directed it into regulated channels. The beautiful legend of Siva flinging five arrows at Desire so that it turned into ashes but permeated, so to speak, the very air of the universe, can also here be recalled. Harking back to Gandhi, one may note here the charming naiveté with which, in 1947, he wrote to Nirmal Kumar Bose : ".....What is Freudian philosophy ? I have not read any writing of his. One friend, himself a professor and follower of Freud, discussed his writings for a brief moment. You are the second."[5]

Gandhi was, indubitably, one of the great social reformers of history. He could not "abolish" untouchability, though the Constitution of India today avers, with a fine indifference to facts, that it has been "abolished". But the jolt which Gandhi, pre-eminently, gave to that age-old infamy produced cracks and fissures which portend its doom. This alone is achievement enough for a fair-size 'great' man, but Gandhi's work was vast and manifold. Even so, this magnificent social reformer hugger certain obvious superstitions. Tagore sharply criticised him for ascribing the terrible Bihar earthquake of 1934 to the sins of the people; in what respects the Biharis had excelled as sinners was not of course explained by him. In 1943, when he wrote to the Viceroy from detention, he referred to food scarcity growing into famine and said he did not quite know whether it was

punishment for the people's sins or administrative corruption and inefficiency which were causing the calamity ! It is notable that for Voltaire, the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 finally destroyed the belief that it was possible to justify God's ways to man, but in Gandhi's case the problem did not arise. Not a blade of grass moved, he felt, without God's injunction behind it, and he could only accept a happening and think out a cause according to his lights. This bent of mind affected naturally his politics. To give only one instance, it can be asked why and how it was that with regard to the Muslim problem Gandhi who began so well let things drift so long till came India's "vivisection", and "an inglorious end" to three decades of work, the "hollow husk," as Gandhi himself felt it, of freedom. Perhaps the only Gandhian answer is that everything rested in God's hands, that Gandhi could act only in accordance with God's will as he understood it and leave the rest, even the fruits of the action, as the Gita taught, to God. Such formulations have perhaps a sublime touch but also, in terms of real life, an element of futility and failure.

Few people in history have made such an effort as Gandhi did for the heightening of character and the accretion of strength that emanates from it. It has been said of the great Spinoza that he sedulously disciplined his mind "not to ridicule, nor to lament, nor to detest the actions of men, but to understand them." On the plane of the spirit, rather than of the intellect, Gandhi made a comparable effort. And he drew on the still living tradition of Indian spirituality for that discipline. Truth, non-violence, continence (a better word, according to Gandhi, is the untranslatable "Brahmacharya"), non-possession, non-stealing, fearlessness—such were the qualities he tried assiduously to cultivate. And his method of acquisition was materialist enough—he would work for it, sit down daily and "meditate". When it is remembered that for most of us it is an extremely embarrassing and humiliating experience to discover our complete inability to concentrate and the consequent shallowness of our thought, Gandhi's method can be better appreciated. Speaking of him in relation to the common run of the world's political leaders, somebody once described Gandhi as "an oasis of meditation in our vast and garrulous vacuity". No wonder that, in spite of lacunae, sometimes disturbingly gaping, in his social understanding, he was a whole

man, his mind's gadgets well adjusted, possessed of a single-mindedness without which achievement is impossible, insensitive to certain human responses to sheer beauty and to works of man's own art which, in their ravishment, stills, as it were, the earth's diurnal course, but in tune with the pulse of a multitudinous, long-suffering people—one of those rare men in face of whom agreement or disagreement, whether about theories or practice, are nearly irrelevant.

To claim, however, as is usually done, that Gandhi was the maker of India's freedom is far from the truth. His contribution to that achievement was, no doubt, very large, but it was not the causative factor. No wide-awake student of history will agree that India could have been free by use of the Gandhian variety of satyagraha alone, without the sequence of national effort for at least fifty years and the great post-war upsurge which swept over the country in 1945-46. It is notable that Subhas Chandra Bose was among the first to address him, in 1944, as the Father of the Nation, and he knew too well the limits of satyagraha. Left free to run a movement on his "non-violent" lines, Gandhi would never hustle and would rather, as he did not hesitate to aver, wait for as long as was necessary than deviate from what he considered "truth and non-violence". Satyagraha was doubtless an important factor, in so far as it helped greatly to rouse and unify the Indian people and also to keep up a spirit of resistance against the foreign government. But there had to be other factors, without which foreign rule could not be pushed out. The people's deviations from the rails of satyagraha, rather than satyagraha itself, put fear in the alien administration and made its continuance impossible. This is not to deny the mobilising role of satyagraha, whose call, understood in their own way by the people, roused them to great endeavour. But to claim satyagraha's exclusive potency in the fight for Indian freedom is unhistorical and untrue.

It was perhaps Renan who once said that when Fate could not destroy a great man it sent him disciples in revenge. These disciples, with the exception only of a very few, would perhaps in Gandhi's case have made some sort of a god out of him after his death—a process which had gone pretty far even during his lifetime, a process which, in fairness to Gandhi, it must be said he discouraged. That such deification has not actual-

ly taken place is evidence of India's comparative maturity, but what has happened, namely, the ascription alone to Gandhi and his movement of the credit for achievement of Indian freedom shows also that the disciples have tried all the art that they knew to impress the country with their own importance. No one man in the history of India struggling to be free has played as large a part as Mahatma Gandhi, but he did not work on virgin soil and he did not work alone.

In the century between the battle of Plassey (1757) and the Great Revolt of 1857, there never was a time when some region or other in India was not fighting for freedom. "Eighteen-fifty-seven" continues to be the symbol of our people's defiant, if still inchoate, urge for the country's freedom. In the eighteen-'seventies, Alan Octavian Hume, "Father of the Congress", discovered, as has been noted earlier, that movements for subversion of British rule were more or less active everywhere and could, unless checked in time, coalesce into something fatal to the régime. The last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth witnessed the first wave of India's recognisably nationalist struggle for freedom, with the Swadeshi and 'boycott' movement of Bengal in the foreground. It was then, also that the so-called terrorist wave began, in Bengal, Punjab and elsewhere—a movement often pilloried by moderate constitutionalists and by sticklers for non-violence, a movement often also blind to the need of the mobilisation of our masses in freedom's struggle, but a movement which helped, indubitably, to restore to a morally debilitated people its sense of manhood, to rekindle a new heroism, to give defiant and shining shape to its desire. The example of a Khudiram in 1908, a "Tiger" Jatin in 1916, a Bhagat Singh in 1930, meant something which neither "liberal" constitutionalism nor non-violent satyagraha could bedim in the vision of the people.

Apart from these trends and as a beacon of the future, there was the rising movement of our working people, toilers in factories and in the fields, whose ranks were joined later by "white-collar" employeres, growingly conscious as the years passed of their links with the common worker and the unity of there aims the history of the working class movement and of its "strike" weapon can be pieced together from the records of the 'eighties of the last century till the present day, and it

was a history by no means unrelated to the national struggle for freedom. It is more than notable that Lala Lajpat Rai, who presided at Calcutta in September 1920 over the special Congress session where the non-co-operation resolution was first adopted, went over to Bombay in October to preside over the inaugural session of the All India Trade Union Congress. There have been differences from time to time between the movement of the organised working class and the Indian National Congress, but it is more important to remember that presidents of the latter like C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose presided also, at one time or another, over annual sessions of the Trade Union Congress. In 1919-21, 1927-30, 1934-41, and in 1945-47, the upsurge of the working class, supported since the early 'thirties by the growing organisation of the peasantry, was a great feature of our national life. Imperialism employed against it all its wiles, besides of course repression, and in the infamous Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929-34) tried at once to decapitate the working class of its leadership and to drive a wedge between the national movement and the working class by lurid denunciations of socialism. In 1945-46 it was clear that while the Congress leadership was keen on restraining the people's advance, the independent movement of the working people swept ahead, but unhappily in the latter's organisation and leadership there were still serious defaults, and it was unable to prevent the emergence of militant and fissiparous forces of communalism which the bourgeois national leadership could not, on its own, defeat. Even so, it was, as noted before, the great post-war upsurge since late-1945 to which the people's enthusiasm over the I. N. A. gave a big impetus, that compelled capitulation of imperialism. That it was only partial is seen in the price that was exacted by imperialism for the transfer of power, the price of partition, of accrbated communal antagonism, of insensate killings and migrations, and of the demoralisation that has followed since like an evil taint on our freedom.

Even so acute and occasionally critical disciple like Kripalani has claimed credit for his master for the achievement of freedom "with such little bloodshed and violence"—credit as much for Gandhi and his movement as for Britain, the generous giver of that freedom ! It is a pity that in this connection

two very important things are blissfully forgotten. One is that, as we have seen before, India not having to pay much of a price for her freedom is a myth. Apart from our martyrs unwedded to non-violence, the process of the transfer of power to deliberately divided India implied, before and after the event and as an inevitable concomitant thereof, an amount of human suffering for millions of people which, in quantity or in quality, is hardly less than the suffering involved in perhaps any of history's great revolutions. The second thing to remember is that, unlike in such revolutions, the suffering borne by the people of India and Pakistan, before and after the constitution of the two states, was at bottom senseless and no spur, at all, to great endeavour. It was a form of massive agony which numbs body and soul and does not release, in the very suffering of it, heightening qualities of character. One might almost say that we purchased our political freedom with coin that was ethically counterfeit, and so it has been that even yet our people do not feel sufficiently the glow of that freedom. On August 15, 1947, there came, of course, to our people's minds a great exhilaration—on that day, even in a place like Calcutta, lacerated till the day before by communalism's ugly spears, the countenance of the people, momentarily, was as the sun shineth in his strength. But the mood and the spirit passed—while it could have been lasting if we had won our freedom otherwise than by arrangement with an imperialism which craftily exacted a price from us which we could not pay without drastic detriment to our soul. This, it bears repetition, should be remembered earnestly, if we wish to understand why even for such forward-looking things as the Plans the hearts of the Indian people yet remain really untouched. The manner we won our freedom—and most of all, it saddened the great Gandhi—has left an unwanted stamp on all that has followed so far.

All this is by no means to belittle Gandhi's achievement, both in regard to the country's freedom and to tasks of social reconstruction. It must not be forgotten that in India, burdened with her years, problems of social change have been, and continue to be, enormous and complicated. Hoary tradition and social and religious complexes constitute a back-log of history which cannot be easily cleared. And Gandhi was at the same time conservative and revolutionary—he did not

for example, deny the moral validity of the institution of the rich as such, though he sought to change the nature of its working, and ultimately even to eliminate it. His main contribution, thus, was not so much in the sphere of bringing about actual and far-reaching social change as in rousing social consciousness about the necessity of such change. He chose this way perhaps because he was supremely pre-occupied with the problem of avoiding violence. It has been suggested that probably it was not his intention to justify the historical growth of the institution of wealth, for in spite of his concept of "Trusteeship" of the rich, he sometimes called methods of accumulation "robbery", but he "ignored it or tolerated it as a result of his conviction that any attempts to question it would result in violence."[6]

It is not to be wondered at that the social policies of the Indian Government which swears by Gandhi's name deviate considerably from the Mahatma's ideas. The emphasis, inevitable in today's context, on industrialization, the apparent impossibility of a return to the loosely constructed system of self-sufficient village republics, the renunciation of non-violence as a guiding principle of State, the lip-service to *Sarvodaya* and the inability even to give real shape on a wide scale to an idea so concrete as Basic education, are examples of this deviation. Throughout his life, Gandhi had been an idealist, in the sense not only that he shrank from philosophical materialism but also that he sought to follow, in all sincerity, certain moral values like truth and non-violence and renunciation of sensual pleasures. Throughout his life, he had also been ready to be inconsistent, to make certain compromises, to concede, though he did not say it in so many words, that absolute truth and absolute morality are intangibles which cannot be practically pursued, that one like himself, wedded to non-violence, could sometimes part from it for real-life reasons, as when he went on a recruiting campaign during World War I or during certain phases of World War II agreed to India participating, on terms, in the war effort. This combination of practicality with the highest idealism made him a most formidable character and in the period of the struggle for freedom, far and away its most powerful figure. It was this combination again which made him useful to the growing bourgeois interests who wanted political power but at the same

time a check to mass forces which, properly roused and guided, could follow up freedom with frontal attack on all exploiting elements. To Gandhi himself, all this was probably unclear; he acted as the bent took him, with a hard-headed empiricism which somehow he had adjusted with his basic idealism. This contradiction in himself became clear after the country was free. His disillusionment marked his difference from the Indian bourgeoisie now ensconced in seats of power. While Government's post-1947 worries were administrative and the like, Gandhi's agonies were profoundly spiritual. Except as a moral influence, magnificently engaged in healing wounds and repairing casualties of the spirit, Gandhi after independence was sick of soul, weary even of the effort of living, at work no doubt but only because it was the only worship he cared for.

It is almost idle, though a few have attempted it, to assess Gandhi as a political thinker. He was by no means allergic to intellectual exercise—no man who at an advanced age read Marx's "Capital" in jail can be so described—but he held to no hard and fast lines of political thought. The main springs of his thinking were linked with Hindu philosophical tradition which gave his mind, as it has done many others, a bent for eclecticism. It is common knowledge that his ways of thought had affinities with those of Tolstoy, Thoreau and Ruskin and of the philosophical anarchists. A recent study discovers his links with the English liberal tradition,[7] *Sarvodaya* being comparable with T. H. Green's concept of the "common good", and his insistence on duties rather than rights being somewhat reminiscent of Bradley's observations on "my station and its duties". One might even find in his reluctance to break with tradition—his attitude, for instance, to the theory of caste, as contrasted with "untouchability" which he opposed root and branch—an affinity with conservative thinkers like Burke. But he was, it goes without saying, a great deal more than such affinities might suggest.

Gandhi always denied the claim made by some of his zealots that he was propounding something new. "I have nothing new to teach", he wrote in *Harijan* on March 28, 1936. "The words 'truth' and 'non-violence' are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try to experiment on both on as vast a scale as I could." "There is no such thing as 'Gandhism'," he said once, "and I do not want to leave any sect after me.

I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truth to our daily life and problems."[8] His "own way", however, was that of the humble seeker calling on God's kindly light to lead him on, in the encircling gloom, one step at a time—in more pedestrian terms, the way of a practical idealist conscious of difficult obstacles but hopeful of overcoming them gradually by what he thought moral means. His conception of what he wanted as the end was thus somewhat unclear. As Dr. Bhagavan Das once noted, "the misfortune is that, as Mahatma Gandhi has with his all-disarming sincerity, often frankly confessed, he 'can only show the way to the Truth and not the Truth itself'." To this was due, Bhagavan Das pointed out, Gandhi's failure to express very concretely what "Swaraj" meant; to this also was due his failure to note that the "Ram Rajya", by which he swore, was, if Valmiki is to be believed, very far from being wholly agricultural—it was highly urban also, as is testified by Valmiki's description of Ram's Ayodhya, nearly as gorgeous as Ravana's Lanka.[9] Gandhi lacked, indeed, the intellectualism which was by no means altogether absent in India's national movement. He was not particularly drawn towards the theme of Asian unity—of Arabian chivalry, Persian poetry, Chinese ethics and the Indian world of thought, all growing up in the soil of a uniform Asian peace—dear to men like Okakura and Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru. In 1886, a noted Bengali poet, Hemchandra Banerjee, wrote words that gave striking expression to the new mood of resurging India. Ride the waves of the sea, he said, climb to the summits of the mountains, steal the stars from they sky, and with both hands grasp the storm, the meteor and the thunder flash; then only dare to approach the labour of life.[10] To such vigorous snapping of quiescent India's ancient bonds, Gandhi was, if anything, rather averse. This apostle of pity wanted a sea-change in human relationships, but he had a great deal more than the convinced conservative's patience in bringing about change; he was ready to be gentle even with flagrantly self-seeking and basically anti-social vested interests; and in his preoccupation with the right kind of means for social change, he would make compromises and concessions to the 'status quo' which were often paradoxical and, in their implications, as in the idea of the rich being 'trustees' of the poor, positively pernicious.

No social theory can or does belittle the value of individual self-reformation. Such reformation, wherever it happens, is productive of good in some sphere or other. If achieved, on a wide enough basis, it brings about a remedy of social distempers. Exhortations for self-improvement should not therefore be deprecated. Gandhi, besides, was never content with mere exhortation ; his *ashrams* were hives of toil, never just refuges for contemplation, and he was a hard task-master, never sparing himself, in work on cleaning a soul or a latrine. This emphasis on work was one of Gandhi's greatest qualities —work with the hands and not merely with the brain, work for the building of a full life which fully engages the faculties, work, above all, in love and for love. Even so, the "Utopian" socialists like Robert Owen, Saint-Simon and Fourier, had nearly a hundred years earlier hoped and worked for the reformation of men by persuading them of the moral superiority of a co-operative society through precept as well as practical demonstration of its success—to the rationalism of the 18th century, they had added a new humanism, and were convinced that once persuaded, intellectually and morally, of the superiority of socialism and its practicability, the world will, without much stress and strain, shed the old ways and adopt the new. If Gandhi had his *ashrams,* and if his *Sarvodaya* followers of today have their own agencies of work, so did the disciples of Saint-Simon and Fourier have their own socialist "settlements". If Jamnalal Bajaj was, as Gandhi thought, a model "trustee" for the poor, by far a worthier and more plausible "trustee" was Robert Owen—the latter, besides, was never guilty of the ultimate hypocrisy of the rich, namely, preaching the virtue of poverty to the poor. Social transformation by moral suasion which changes the hardest of hearts and by making sure of individual self-reformation guarantees the quality of the transformation, is thus not an exclusively Gandhian contribution to social thought. It has its merits, no doubt, but history has shown repeatedly that when projected into a practical "social perspective", it tends to become impractical. Not to recognise its limitations and to harp on it as the only remedy of society's ills is to take deceptive moral unction to one's soul and to put on a mantle of myth as a safeguard against the chilling blasts of real life problems.

In the "Modern Review" (October 1935), there appeared

the report of an important interview which throws much light on Gandhi's thought. A question was put to him : "Shall we take it that the fundamental difference between you and the socialists is that you believe that men live more by self-direction or will than by habit and they believe that men live more by habit than by will ; that being the reason why you strive for self-correction while they try building up a system under which men will find it impossible to exercise their desire for exploiting others ?" His answer to the question was as follows: "While admitting that man actually lives by habit, I hold that it is better for him to live by the exercise of his will. I also believe that men are capable of developing their will to an extent that will reduce exploitation to a minimum. I look upon an increase in the power of the State with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimising exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress".[11]

Here is Gandhi's characteristic stress on purely individual effort, his belief that outward social forms are not so important if only the individual pursues the path towards perfection. He often described himself as a better socialist or communist than those who wore that label, and basically, he would say, he shared their objectives. But he was not primarily interested in any delineable social order that could be called socialist ; his prime concern was purification of the means of social transformation in conformity with what he understood by the spirit of love and of human unity. He would yield to none in his desire for the elimination of exploitation, though he would make it a point to aver that while exploitation deserved moral disapprobation, the individual exploiter must be approached with love and forbearance. Social institutions based on exploitation continue because, in Gandhi's thought, the exploiters and the exploited both cooperate in their maintenance, and if only the exploiters individually could be persuaded to shed their selfishness and the exploited no longer feared the grip on them of the exploiters, everything would be lovely in the garden. A supremely moral way of revolution will, in Gandhi's scheme of things, bring about through God's grace and of course in God's good time, a condition of happiness, equality and human dignity on earth. The process may take long, but it is really short because it is

sure. Release from the shackles of self, sought by man through the millennia, will achieve a purification which alone is the cure for society's ills. This, of course, is by no means an original idea of Gandhi's, but being the man of action that he was, and thrown into the vortex of a restless epoch, he drew it out of the world's private armoury of thought and utilised it for wide-scale political application.

A small set of faithful disciples, represented best of all by the gentle Vinoba Bhave, attempt today to keep up this aspect of the master's spirit, but Jawaharlal Nehru, the greatest, on any computation, of Gandhi's disciples, has found himself unable to share his understanding. This is no surprise, for if Marx was driven once to exclaim, "thank God, I am no Marxist !", how much more is it likely for one in the thick of things in our restless and vital and dynamic age to be unable to swear by 'Gandhism' ! Nehru once wrote on this issue : "In spite of the closest association with him (Gandhi) for many years, I am not clear in my own mind about his objective. I doubt if he is clear himself. One step is enough for me, he says ; and he does not try to peep into the future or to have a clearly conceived end before him. Look after the means, and the end will take care of itself, he is never tired of repeating. Be good in your personal individual lives, and all else will follow. That is not a political or scientific attitude, nor is it perhaps an ethical attitude. It is narrowly moralist, and it begs the question : What is goodness ? Is it merely an individual affair or a social affair ? Gandhiji lays all stress on character and attaches little importance to intellectual training and development. Intellect without character is likely to be dangerous, but what is character without intellect ? How, indeed, does character develop ? Gandhiji has been compared to the medieval Christian saints, and much that he says seems to fit in with this. It does not fit in at all with modern psychological experience and method....."[12]

Perhaps it is important at this stage to try and straighten out the tangle caused by the "ends-and-means" controversy which bedevils much of our present social understanding. One is often told that while Gandhi insisted on the purity of the means to be adopted in the struggle for a better society, Marxism, the only world-view (*wellanuschauun*) and world-movement that seeks to build a better world, is not only in-

different to the means to be employed but tolerates or even encourages ruthlessness, deception and terror, ridicules toleration and human compassion, abjures personal ties and loyalties, and for the sake of the revolution asks man to strip himself of every moral scruple. This charge is often framed in terms that are intellectually negligible or even just vulgar, but that should not deter us from a serious examination of it. Such examination, however, can only be very summary.

Marxists, if they are worth that name, are, as much as Gandhi himself, morally serious people in a basic sense, even though they might not parade it in conventionally acceptable terms. With no less of a passion than Gandhi possessed, they want to know the truth about social evolution, for knowing that alone, to the extent that is possible at a given period, they can advance towards real freedom. Marxists have thus come to resist the lure of consoling visions which, in spite of bringing a measure of satisfaction to individuals, are ineffective in the cure of society's distempers. To them, it is necessary for moral idealism to be also practical, for if for achievable objectives fascinating but unrealisable hopes are substituted, the people become immobilised for effective action. The very struggle for a new social order, tangible in its forms, demanding voluntary dedication, exacting an understanding of a work-a-day world with its horror as well as its glory, releasing in the process the power of the spirit which has made man the hero of the creation that we know—brings about an enrichment of human nature, the goal of endeavour being man's return, as Karl Marx said in "The Holy Family", to his "universal nature in a universal manner, that is, as a total human being." That "universal nature" has been bruised and nearly negated by the historical fact of class srtruggle, the clash of interest, often open and perhaps oftener unavowed, between those whose toil keeps life going and those who appropriate the fruits of that toil—a struggle which Marxists do not advocate or have any preference for, but whose existence they cannot deny or forget. Enmeshed in coils of their own making, men have become subjected, as it were, to their own means of production, but the balance will be redressed when men themselves will be masters of all the means of production and use them in accordance with a social plan. Then alone will humanity take the long delayed leap "from the realm of

necessity to the realm of freedom"; then alone will pre-history end and history begin. Till then, of course, glimmerings will be seen of the glory of man's effort and achievement, but the full face of the peak will remain shrouded in mist and rain.

To achieve the ideal—or as much of it as can be achieved, for there never can be a full stop to things—it is essential to be practical, not in a mean or sordid sense, but in the sense of being ready for contingencies, and if they are hostile, overcome them. For the supremely moral objective of socialism, certainly it is desirable to follow consistently, if we can, moral principles in so far as we understand them. But can such principles be always, and perhaps preferably in advance, formulated concretely? And if general rules can be borne in mind, can the unavoidability, in certain circumstances, of exceptions to such rules be denied? Everybody indeed, is making such exceptions—even Gandhi himself when in 1916 he was recruiting soldiers for Britain's war and on so many other occasions—and we cannot indeed behave ethically unless we make exceptions. Yet Marxists are particularly singled out for blame on this count; their fault is that they are more honest about it than the others.

It is surely a good rule not to inflict pain, but sometimes serious operations involving suffering become necessary and even desirable, for avoidance of such operation would cause even greater pain. Wars have taken place in history—it would have been a happy thing if they could have been avoided, but they took place. Some of them have been fought, inevitably but painfully, and for just causes—the wars of liberation, for example, which have not ended yet, as Algeria testifies today. There have been revolutions, like the Great French Revolution of 1789 or the October Revolution of 1917,, and inevitably, the terroristic methods of reaction called for a revolutionary "terror"—by no means a pleasant thing in itself, but necessary in the interests of humanity and to that extent just. A hundred instances could be given to show how force has been the midwife of new social forms emerging out of the old, but it is not necessary. There is no question at all of the idealisation of violence—no revolutionary worth the name does it—but since the bad old world does not voluntarily depart from the stage and on the contrary violently defends itself and tries to put manacles on the hands of common folk for rear they

overthrow it, there is, in real life, no alternative to the forces of social advance being ready for the challenge and strong enough to defeat it.

When such blatant and unutterably ugly violence was practised by a power calling itself Christian and democratic in the atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not a bishop in Christendom turned a hair, and with a few individual exceptions, of whom Gandhi was one, the moralists who are usually so distressed about the so-called identification by Marxists of ends with means, appeared ready to justify the atrocity on grounds of expediency. When suffering is inflicted on the Kikuyu in Africa, or in Tunisia or in Korea or in Algeria, the official Christian conscience remains generally very placid, As a matter of fact, a commission appointed by the British Council of Churches, which included a number of eminent theologians, sanctioned the use of the atomic bomb in cases of aggression. A commission appointed by the Church Assembly went further and affirmed, with examples. that there could be circumstances in which the maxim "necessity knows no law" should apply. It is not relevant at the moment to discuss these findings, but it is interesting that the principle of suspending, in certain circumstances, the generally accepted moral rules of conduct is conceded by the Church and by almost all the moralists. Why Marxists alone should be denied the support of an argument permitted to others, is a significant point.[13]

It must be borne in mind, however, by Marxists as well as by others, that the problem of means is a very serious matter, that much avoidable suffering and failure has been caused by lack of proper care for it, that our whole attention might be given to finding the most immediately effective means with the result that, the end being distant, the means might themselves turn out to be such as would damage or even wreck the ends originally sought. There is no doubt that from a practical point of view, that course of action alone should be adopted which would, in the circumstances prevailing, produce a balance of good results. Care must, however, be taken to see that a course of action which would, on balance, produce more evil than good, is not adopted. A moral choice of this kind is difficult but it has to be made ; it is perhaps even fraught with risks of self-deception; but they have to be faced and insured

against. The task is complex and knotty, but it has to be undertaken. And as John Lewis acutely observed, there is no fool-proof moral road, as man makes his own history. Gandhi as a holy man may have claimed that he knew the fool-proof road, but it is wiser to remember that we do not live in a world of holy men. And the moral task, particularly for those whose concern is with social transformation, is precisely not to deceive ourselves.

Gandhi never was, nor claimed to be, always and everywhere consistent, but on the "ends-and-means" issue he was firm. Even so, however, his advice to Jews under the Hitler heel and to Czechoslovakia overrun by fascist forces proved to be, inevitably, little more than a waste of breath. His faithful friend Kallenbach himself a German Jew, could not accept the position which, from his Indian distance, Gandhi had taken up. And even in India, his meanderings during 1940-45 on the issue of Congress support to the war effort showed how a rigid adherence to formularies did not take one far.

If life was such that reforms could be written on a clean slate, Gandhi's point of view would have been the happiest and most effective of all. But man carries the birthmarks of the old society based on exploitation of one variety or the other, birthmarks which cannot be wished away. To cleanse ourselves of the mire of the past is itself an exacting and protracted process. Millennia of slavery, serfdom, capitalism, and the war of every man against his neighbour, have corrupted human material. That, of course, is not the whole story of man ; alongside the horror, there also has been the glory. But the horror has left its impress which will take time and great effort to efface. And so even the building of socialism brings to light the failure of man as yet to change himself enough to be consistently worthy builders of the new society. This should not make us weep and gnash our teeth, nor should it turn our fancy to thoughts only of intangible instruments of self-reformation like the grace of God. We should, on the contrary, shed all make-believe and gird our loins for the tasks that are objectively indicated.

Men in the mass cannot be compelled or even just persuaded to be virtuous, either by individual moral exhortation (which includes the coercive sanction of God's disfavour) or by action, punitive and reformatory, of the State. But persua-

sion becomes a practicable and pleasant possibility only in a society whose character is such that interests in the community are not opposed, necessarily, to one another. Moral suasion, than which nothing can be better, is genuinely possible only where one can work at the same time for the common good and for oneself. This is the greatest justification of revolution, of social transformation even at a price, provided only it is not too high a price. Fear of such transformation might appear morally defensible, but it is not really so.

It was this understanding which was alien to Gandhi, and the result was that, noble soul as he was, he felt forlorn and lost when in the last months of his life he was anguished by the sight of man's inhumanity to man—he felt that there had come over Hindus and Muslims something inherently wrong which only prayer and love and moral exhortation and example could perhaps correct, but he did not know that certain definite social forces, the forces of native and foreign reaction, were working to cause the calamity, forces which only a clear social understanding, rather than prayer and penance, could fight and overcome. All honour to Gandhi that in those dark days he was harking back, almost alone in the world, to concepts like love and the pursuit of truth which illumine the annals of man, but he never knew that they would be practically valid, on a large enough scale, when a new social environment was fought for and won by the people's own effort. Perhaps even he knew it, but his fear of violence and of deviations from the automatic equilibrium he imagined in *Ram Rajya* made him shy away from the tasks it demanded.

He was too big a man, however, not to know that moral suasion by itself was not a powerful enough instrument for real social change. "I have no influence", he wrote in *Harijan* (July 26, 1942), "to direct people's energy in a channel in which they have no interest." He could not help knowing also that his movement had props that were not quite good enough. "I am quite of your opinion", he wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru on April 1, 1928, "that some day we shall have to start an intensive movement without the rich people and without the vocal educated class. But that time is not yet."[a] Such a movement, unfortunately, he never could bring himself to start, not even in 1945-46, when, with no more than a slight

risk to his presuppositions about non-violence, he could have summoned and led a magnificent upsurge.

A continuing challenge thrown by Gandhi to the twentieth century relates to his insistence, echoed today by *Sarvodaya* spokesmen, that what the world needed was a higher standard of spiritual living, and for that a lower level of material well-being was a necessary pre-requisite. It was in line with this strand of his thought that he had made, in 1909, in *Hind Swaraj*, certain extraordinary formulations. "India's salvation consists", he then wrote, "in unlearning what she has learnt during the last fifty years. The railways, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors, and such like have all to go; and the so-called upper classes have to learn consciously, religiously, and deliberately the simple peasant life, knowing it to be a life giving true happiness." Later, he added: "Every time I get into a railway train or use a motor bus I know I am doing violence to my sense of what is right." It was thus he came to speak of "cottage industries", "bread labour" (which everyone must practise) and "nature cure" as essential items of his programme for the people. He never quite agreed, though in his action he often seemed to relent in his view, that the merits of machine civilisation far outweighed its defects, and that the throw-back to the pre-industrial age which his belief involved was neither desirable nor practicable. He must have noticed that in spite of a feeling for him akin to adoration, few indeed of his own followers could, or did, practise his precepts, and he himself had not unoften to deviate from them. Even those who span did so more as a matter of patriotic discipline than on account of a belief in its virtues as an instrument of achieving a better society. He could not have been unaware that throughout history man's inventive faculties have been busy devising new possibilities of leisure, and leisure surely was not just a bane but in a sensible society was a real boon. Gandhi was right no doubt in condemning the trends towards excessive and indiscriminate mechanisation, but he was blind to the fact that it is by proper utilisation of technological developments and scientific discoveries that poverty can be abolished and prospects of healthy living for all made possible. Here, again, his message seems more relevant to conditions in the West, where a certain saturation with material improvements might have taken place, than in under-develop-

ed countries like India, where Gandhi himself had passionately declaimed that God could only come to the people in the garb of food.[15] And so when Vinoba or Jayaprakash Narayan speak now of a higher standard of living as a new fetish and recall that the Indian concept of life "is that we are living in order to achieve our deliverance—whether we call it *Nirvana* or *Moksha*—deliverance from the limitations of time and space, from the limitations of life and death, from bondage", it sounds somewhat magnificent but in terms of our people's problems, rather hollow and deceptive at the same time.

It is perhaps necessary here also to contest the impression given out by Gandhi and the *Sarvodaya* theorists that the Indian pre-occupation, through the aeons of our history, has been predominantly with the problem of deliverance in the rather negative way that they suggest. Indeed, a great man—and a great scholar—Albert Schweitzer, said the same thing when he wrote : "To Indian thought all effort directed to triumphs in knowledge and power, to the improvement of man's outer life and society as a whole is mere folly.....The religions which decisively deny the world and life (Brahmanism and Buddhism) show no interest in civilization.....In Hinduism, world-and-life-affirmation has never succeeded in getting the mastery over world-and-life-negation. In India there never was a break with traditional pessimism....."[16] This, however, while a suggestive observation, is by no means the whole truth. The evidence of our arts—our sculpture and painting and poetry; of our technological advance in metallurgy and ship-building, for instance; of our cities like the Mauryan Pataliputra, four times the size of imperial Rome in her heyday; of *Kamasastra* and the sixty-four arts (*Kala*) recommended to the man-about-town; of Kautilya's *Arthasastra;* of the vivid, uninhibited humanity of our epics; of the succession of materialists and heretics whom orthodoxy and state power could never obliterate; and of a hundred other things, cannot be explained away. We could not have lasted so long—and India's life has not been a mere longevity—if world-and-life-negation was our patented speciality. We have had more than our share of sorrow and failure—that accounts perhaps for a certain predilection for pessimism, but our people have something positive in them which has remained unvanquished during the ages. There may also be a certain fineness and dig-

nity in the indifference that comes natural to many of us, the indifference to the glamour of mere worldly success. This fineness Gandhi embodied in his manifold character, but it should not blind us to the life-affirming values of Indian tradition which need to be stressed more than ever today when the under-developed countries of the world seek through socialism, for there is no other way, a reconciliation on a higher level of spirit with matter, without which we shall cease to count in an eager and changing world.

More than any one man, Gandhi shook India out of her lethargy and the torpor of centuries. Like Bhagirath in Hindu mythology cajoling the gods to let the Ganga flow and vivify the land, Gandhi had brought the waters of exhilaration to a land that was parched and dry and choked with the dust of the ages. This river of life that he had invoked was, like the Ganga deriving from the Himalayas, Indian in every nuance of it. There was a sort of remote affinity between him and the Hebrew prophets; but like David who laid aside the armour of Saul that was put on him and took the pebbles from his own brook, the Mahatma laid aside the social armour of the West and took the simple pebbles out of his own national brook.[17] This explains both his strength and his weakness. Even in the paradoxes of his behaviour and of his thought, he was rooted in the life of his people and inseparable from it. But a certain detachment was needed if he was to appreciate the problems of his people in the setting of a world society whose social and economic imperatives were to him unfamiliar and unpleasant. Without that detachment and the perception that such detachment might have lent him, he remains a superb personality, a nearly elemental force which gave a jolt to customs and habits and questioned the authorities behind them, but was unable clearly to show the country the way it should traverse. A comparable figure, Sun Yat-Sen in China, appears to have had this detachment, and while yielding pride of place to Gandhi in respect of the stature and sublimity of personality, he has been more vitally influential on the course of China's progress and of world advance than Gandhi in India. This may sound blasphemy to many in India, but it is true. The answers which Gandhian ideas give to the problems of Indian life—of poverty, of the land, of industrial advance—may command

respect but are not, in practice, effective, except in isolated instances. All the gifts evoked by the *Sarvodaya* spirit—of land, of whole villages, of property, of life itself—are excellent illustrations of an estimable idealism but they do not solve the problem and do not obviate the need of the seizure of political power by the people for socio-economic transformations. In so far as Gandhi and *Sarvodaya* recall to us some of India's extraordinary specialities in thought and action they deserve to be honoured, but those specialities—of tolerance and compassion and desistance from evil—can really come into their own after the ground is cleared by the people's own action. In creating the atmosphere for such action, Gandhi made a unique contribution, but to such action itself he was indifferent and often even hostile. As a matter of fact, the aura of Gandhi's glory lent a certain nobility to a generally timorous bourgeois movement which prized and utilized his capacity of mobilising the people against foreign rule and at the same time of restricting mass activity within limits thought safe for the men of property.

It will be idle to speculate what India's contribution to Asian and world history might have been if Gandhi held to no such concepts as that of "trusteeship" of the rich for the poor, and based himself instead on the independent strength of the toiling masses whom he loved no doubt but never thought adult enough for purposes of social struggle. It is better to take stock only of what we now. And what we know is a proud story. India, her mind and heart bruised and numb, had slumbered so long that perhaps none but a Gandhi could rouse her properly. He was of the Indian earth, earthy, and yet endowed with a strength that one associates with the elements. Not for a thousand years or more has India resounded to any name so much as Gandhi's. None else has lived a life as full and rounded as his, a life to which martyrdom added a special radiance. The ashes of his body were scattered in a hundred and fourteen Indian rivers, a symbolic reminder, that he strode the Indian earth like a gentle Colossus, that where India is, Gandhi is there too. None else —not even Rabindranath Tagore or the great figures of modern China—has represented in his life and work, as Gandhi has done uniquely, the spirit, schizofrenic and sublime, of New Asia. "My life itself is my message", he said once

towards the end of his life, and indeed Gandhi is greater by far than Gandhism.[18] The 'ism was always rather inchoate, largely self-contradictory, and in its indifference to the modern context of life something of a pathetic fallacy. Concretely speaking, it was not Gandhism but a combination of many factors that brought India her independence. Free India thus deviates, as noted before, from Gandhian ideas about the proper organisation of her life. Yet of all our heroes in recent Indian history, this frail little man was the tallest. And as the peoples of the world move forward and the desire for peace on earth and goodwill among all men approaches accomplishment, the voice of a Gandhi will be heard ever more clearly. No label need be put on his thought but the expansive one of humanism, and while we shall no doubt study his career and examine his errors and paradoxes and waywardnesses, we shall cherish the best and finest of his qualities—simplicity and the quest for truth, gentleness and good cheer, equanimity in sorrow and danger, love and fellowship and unremitting labour—qualities without which the life that is yet to be, in the East or in the West, will wither before it is born. To his greatness Gandhi might conceivably have added high qualities of intellect and a comprehensive insight into social reality which intellectual discernment alone could help him to achieve. But in that case, he would not have been the Gandhi we have known—a grandman, unique and integrated, who spanned a whole epoch with power and with grace, but limited of understanding and unable to show India, except in beautiful flashes of stress on right conduct, the way ahead in an uncommonly complicated world. This world of ours is not, as Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan once said, the natural home of perfection. But the thirst for perfection, which Gandhi felt in his best moments, was not a mere moralist's fad. It may even be something of an illusion, but it is by such illusion that men often rise to greatness.

Notes To Chapter XII

[1] Louis Fischer, "Life of Mahatma Gandhi", p. 472; of. N. K. Bose, "My Days with Gandhi", *passim.*

[2] Bose, *ibid.* p. 28.

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 170-88.

[4] Quoted in Fischer. *op. cit.* p. 472.

[5] Bose, *op. cit.* p. 183.

[6] T. K. N. Unnithan, "Gandhi and Free India" (1956), p. 230; this is an important study.

[7] B. S. Sharma, "Gandhi as a Political Thinker", *passim*.

[8] Tendulkar, IV. pp. 66-67.

[9] Dr. Bhagwan Das in "Mahatma Gandhi", ed. S. Radhakrishnan (1944), p. 75.

[10] Quoted in Haus Hohn "A History of Nationalism in the East" (1929), p. 367.

[11] cf. N. K. Bose, "Gandhism : an analysis" in "Whither India?" (ed. Iqbal Singh & Raja Rao, 1948), pp. 23-58.

[12] "Nehru on Gandhi" (New York, 1948), pp. 90-91.

[13] John Lewis, "Marxism and the Open Mind" (1957), pp. 112 et seqq., oers some very valuable comment which has been utilised in this chapter.

[14] Tendulkar, "Mahatma", Vol. VIII, pp. 351-52.

[15] cf. Reginald Reynolds, "To live in Mankind", p. 198.

[16] Albert Schweitzer, "My Life and Thought", an Autobiography" (London, 1954), pp. 177, 215-16.

[17] E. Stanley Jones, "Mahatma Gandhi" (1950), pp. 25-26.

[18] cf. E. M. S. Namboodiripad, "The Mahatma and the 'Ism' " (1958) *passim*.

A NOTE ON BOOKS

The literature of what may be called Gandhiana is immense. Luckily, there are good bibliographies—*Gandhiana : a bibliography of Gandhian literature* (1949) by P. G. Deshpande, and better still, Jagdish Saran Sharma's *Mahatma Gandhi : A Descriptive Bibliography* (1955).

Gandhi's own writings are in themselves an endless, but always rewarding, study. The first volume has recently come out of the Government of India-sponsored *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* a monumental project whose completion in fifty volumes will be eagerly awaited. Meanwhile, there are numerous Navajivan publications which carry on the good work done earlier, which deserves acknowledgement, by publishers like G. A. Natesan, Ganesh and S. Ganesan. It is difficult to pick and choose among the available publications, but no student of Gandhi and of Indian freedom can do without *Young India, 1919-22* (1925), *Speeches and Writings* (1922), *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (2 vols., 1927-29), *Indian Home Rule or Hind Swaraj* (1919), *Satyagraha in South Africa* (1925), *India's Case for Swaraj* (1932), *Indian State Problems* (1941), *Economics of Khadi* (1941), *Women and Social Injustice* (1947), *Gita-the Mother* (1947), *Delhi Diary*, being a collection of prayer speeches from September 10, 1947, to January 30, 1948 (1948), *Non-violence in Peace and War* (1949), *Hindu Dharma* (1950), *Towards Non-violent Society* (1951), *Satyagraha : Non-violent Resistance* (1951). These publications, some parts of which overlap, are illustrative but very far from being exhaustive.

Alongside these, should be consulted *Mahatma Gandhi : His Own Story* (1930), *and Mahatma Gandhi At Work* (1931), both edited by C. F. Andrews ; *Selections from Gandhi* (1948), edited by Nirmal Kumar Bose ; *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (1951), selected and introduced by Ronald Duncan ; *Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi* (1947), edited by J. P. Chander; *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (1945), edited by R. K. Prabhu

and U. R. Rao; *Sarvodaya : Its Principles and Programme* (1951), edited by S. N. Agarwal; *The Wit and Wisdom of Gandhi* (1951), and *The Gandhi Reader* (1955), the latter particularly valuable, both edited by Homer A. Jack.

The standard biography so far is D. G. Tendulkar's *Mahatma : Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* (8 vols., 1951-54), a massive work whose best feature is copious quotation from Gandhi's own speeches and writings, and a wealth of illustration. The evocation of atmosphere, however, is weak and there is hardly an attempt at evaluation; this latter task, however, is perhaps still too difficult for us. Though limited in scope, Pyarelal's *Mahatma Gandhi : The Last Phase* (2 vols., 1954, 1958) vies with it in volume, the writer obtruding rather more than Tendulkar does. Louis Fischer's *Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1951), in spite of a certain disproportion and a somewhat slick approach to things, is a useful compilation.

Romain Rolland's *Mahatma Gandhi* (1924) is, of course, a memorable and perceptive piece of writing. Verrier Elwin's *Mahatma Gandhi* (1932) is brief but repays perusal. Books like Robert Bernays' *Naked Fakir* (1931), and Glorney Bolton's *The Tragedy of Gandhi* (1934), have lost their vogue but have still some value. H. S. L. Polak, H. N. Brailsford and Lord Pethick-Lawrence collaborated in a volume entitled *Mahatma Gandhi* (1949) which will be found of interest and in parts very good; earlier, Polak had written *Mahatma Gandhi : the Man and His Mission* (1943) D. F. Karaka's *Out of Dust* (1942) deserves mention. *Gandhiji : His Life and Work* (1944), published on his seventy-fifth birthday is a notable compilation. The Rev. J. J. Doke's *M. K. Gandhi : an Indian Patriot in South Africa* (1909) is still indispensable for his early career. Michael Overman's *Glimpses of a Great Life* (1952) is a competent piece of writing. Jan Baros edited *Mahatma Gandhi : a Pictorial History of a Great Life* (1949), which has been improved upon in 1957 by a similar but more carefully prepared publication under the auspices of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry of the Government of India.

There are many books of reminiscences about Gandhi, but one of the most valuable of them, because of its remarkably critical approach, is unfortunately unavailable—Indulal Yajnik's *Gandhi as I Knew Him*, Part I, 1914-22 (1933), and Part II, 1923-39 (1943). Chandrashanker Shukla edited two interesting

volumes, *Reminiscences of Gandhiji* (1949), and *Incidents of Gandhiji's Life* (1951). R. K. Prabhu's collection of anecdotes, *This was Bapu* (1954) and G. Ramachandran's *The Man Gandhi* (1947), are also of interest. *In The Shadow of the Mahatma* (1953) is a notable book of reminiscences of Gandhi and correspondence with him by one of India's top capitalists, G. D. Birla. Along with it may be mentioned an interesting little book on the correspondence between Gandhi and Jamnalal Bajaj, *To A Gandhian Capitalist* (1951), edited by Kaka Kalelkar. Of the reminiscence variety of books, one of the best is Nirmal Kumar Bose's *My Days with Gandhi* (1953).

No mentionable history as such of the movements launched in India by Gandhi seems yet to have been written. The struggle of the Champaran peasantry (1917) has, however, been well recorded in Rajendra Prasad's *Satyagraha in Champaran* (1949), and in D. G. Tendulkar's *Gandhi in Champaran* (1957) which, however, does not improve upon the former. There is a mass of material about Gandhi's campaigns in India which await careful study.

Richard B. Gregg's *The Power of Non-violence* (1938) remains perhaps a better analysis than any made by Indian writers. Vincent Sheean's *Lead, Kindly Light* (1950) and Reginald Reynolds' *To Live in Mankind* (1951) are notable. R. R. Diwakar essayed a serious study : *Satyagraha : its Technique and History* (1946). K. G. Mashruwala's *Practical Non-violence* (1945) is sincere and thoughtful. So is *The Economy of Permanence* (1948), by J. M. Kumarappa. *Gandhi and Gandhism* (1945), by Nagendranath Gupta, *Gandhi* (1944) by Carl Health, *Gandhi : World Citizen* (1945), by Muriel Lester, *Mahatma Gandhi : An Essay in Appreciation* (1931), by R. M. Gray and Manilal C. Parekh, *The Cross Moves East* (1931) by J. S. Hoyland, *Mahatma Gandhi : An Interpretation* (1948), by E. Stanley Jones, *Tolstoy and Gandhi,* by Kalidas Nag (1950), *Gandhi : Fighter without a sword,* by Jeannette Eaton (1950), *Mahatma Gandhi and the World* (1945), by K. L. Shridharani. *Gandhi : A Prophecy,* by B. K. Mallik (1948), *In the Path of Mahatma Gandhi* (1950) by G. E. G. Catlin, *Gandhi's View of Life,* by Chandrashanker Shukla (1951), *Gandhi as a Social Revolutionary* (1953, by Wilfred Wellock, *My Gandhi* (1954), by J. H. Holmes, and many

others that could be named, will be found more or less useful. J. B. Kripalani's *The Gandhian Way* (1945), and Nirmal Kumar Bose's *Studies in Gandhism* (1947) are among the few really acute and thoughtful studies on the subject. By comparison, B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya's *Gandhi and Gandhism* (2 vols. 1942) is unsatisfying. Even more so, perhaps, are such works as K. M. Munshi's *I Follow the Mahatma* (1940), which badly needs re-writing.

The *Gandhi Memorial Peace Number of Viswabharati Quarterly* (October 1949) is a notable compilation, but of unequal value. The discussion on *Gandhian Outlook and Techniques* (1953), being the verbatim report of the proceedings of a New Delhi seminar, with Lord Boyd-Orr as Chairman, is very interesting, J. B. Kripalani's contribution being particularly valuable. An indispensable book is the volume of tributes to *Mahatma Gandhi* (1944), edited with an introduction by S. Radhakrishnan. *Nehru on Gandhi* (New York edition, 1948) is a moving and very suggestive selection of Jawaharlal Nehru's observations, strewn in many writings, on Gandhi ; reference is also called for to Nehru's finest work, his *Autobiography* (1936). Rajendra Prasad's recently published memoirs (1958) recall many things of interest and importance to a study of Gandhi.

Gandhi's political thinking is discussed in such books as *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (1946) by G. N. Dhawan, and *Gandhi as a Political Thinker* (1956), by B. S. Sharma, both somewhat pedestrian studies. D. M. Datta has written on *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (1953), and M. S. Patel on *The Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (1953). J. J. Anjaria wrote an interesting little *Essay on Gandhian Economics* (1945), and there is a significant chapter on Gandhism in Jayaprakash Narayan's now nearly forgotten book *Why Socialism ?* (1936). In M. N. Roy's voluminous works there are many critical references to Gandhi's thought. B. R. Ambedkar gave an interesting lecture on *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah* (1943) ; his angle on Gandhi was, as is well known, rather perverse—not perhaps without reason in the Indian social context, but perverse all the same. Very differently, and with some insight, K. R. Kripalani has written on *Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru* (1947). A notable, if not very profound, study is *Gandhi and Marx* (1954) by K. G. Mashruwala : an

introduction is written to it by Vinoba Bhave. Very recently, a leading Indian Marxist, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, has published a series of essays under the title *The Mahatma and the Ism* (1958).

The history of the struggle for freedom in India, with which Gandhi's life and work was inextricably associated, requires a separate bibliography which cannot, even in a summary, be attempted here.

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